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By HUGH RAYMOND

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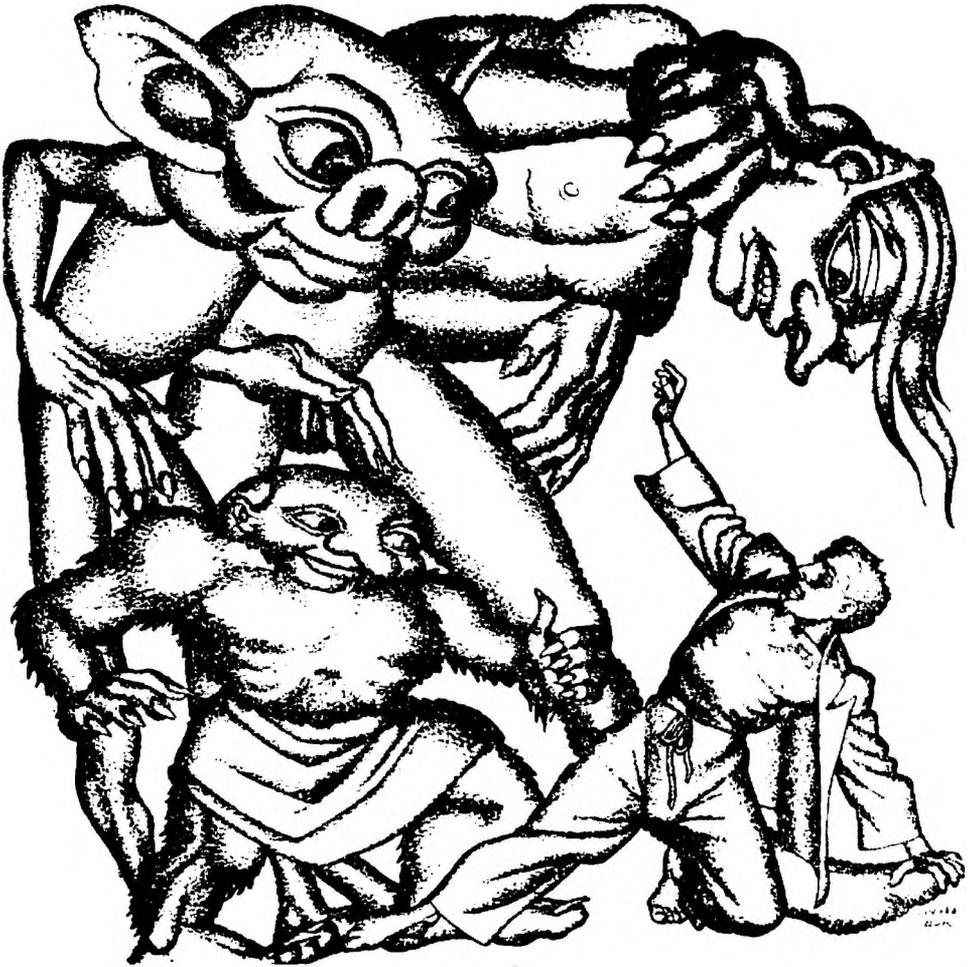
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## UNCANNY TALES

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# THE GOBLINS WILL GET YOU

By HUGH RAYMOND

*Illustration by Bok*

**When playing poker with goblins, be careful what you bid.  
Particularly if the goblins have ulterior purposes.**

I shouldn't have happened to a dog.

I woke up one night and saw them grinning over the counterpane at me like a row of painted heads off a Coney Island three-sheet. The time was three o'clock as I could easily see by the luminous hands of my alarm clock. Oddly enough I remained unshocked.

They explained later that a sort of preparatory hyponosis had been worked—involving a lot of ground-up vegetable greens I found under my bed every night for a week before and couldn't up to then account for.

I lay quietly and simply stared and they stared back. I was a bit upset, of course, but none of your "crawling feeling down the spine" stuff. The faces were inhuman, distorted, elongated, squashed, some nauseating, others merely enough to make one squeamish. And the glow which backgrounded the whole scene took away a lot of the mystery. They had hands and feet—plainly seen — and they didn't float.

Finally I opened diplomatic negotiations.

I said, "Hello."

The faces yawned a trifle, grew misty and jagged, then resumed a solid appearance. This I found was due to the impact of physical noises on their nervous systems. Being creatures of an order necessarily "other dimensional," they found it a trifle

difficult maintaining what to them was a decent state of appearance.

As soon as the shaking and quaking had stopped and the gargoylish eyes had been popped back into many sockets, a large-headed one goggled fiercely in what was probably intended to be a reassuring smile and said, "Teach us to speak English."

This was the first indication of the peculiar irrelevancy which governed their reactions. Later on it was enough to drive anyone crazy. As a matter of fact it did.

"But you are speaking English," I remarked, collecting my thoughts as rapidly as possible and pulling my pajamas away from my legs to which they were glued with cold perspiration.

"That's what you think," three cavernous mouths intoned solemnly in unison and three enormous heads bent toward me. "We want to know the rules."

"You mean the ropes," I answered.

"We mean the rules," snapped the first big head.

"That's what I mean," I said and picked up a flashlight. The beam didn't affect them at all. But the case flew back suddenly and crashed through the high back of the bed.

"Don't get tough!" warned all the heads wiggling and wagging.

I nursed a wrenched wrist and

stuck my tongue out at them.

"So help me Joe, I only wanted to see you better. Though why, I don't know. By the standards of this world you make a hippopotamus look like a raging beauty."

They subsided grumbling. The flashlight was returned, badly dented.

**WELL**, the first few nights were the hardest. I managed to get them past the silly impression that they didn't speak English at the end of the second. By the fourth night I was missing the lost sleep. But I got no reprieve.

They were queer creatures by any standards. At first they were reticent in talking about themselves. What was wanted chiefly was knowledge about other people. From hints they let drop. I concluded, finally, that they were certainly not of the tribe of Adam or any branch thereof or doing business at the same stand.

After awhile I stopped feeling sleepy. This was due mainly to the fact that while they read the books they had me bring around from the local libraries, I snatched a couple of thousand winks, interrupted at choice intervals by a twinge as they awakened me by the crude, though simple process of banging the book on my forehead.

What a sight in the odd glow which emanated from all around them! Like a scene out of some Oz book. A row of heads gathered in a semi-circle, beyond the light, pitch blackness and me in bed. Great eyes popping and staring. Occasionally one or another would laugh and the whole bunch would go reeling off into instability

for a few seconds and then come to a standstill like water in a quiet pool.

I stood all this for two weeks. When I ran out of money paying for lending library rentals, they materialized some and gave it to me.

Holy mother! Twenty thousand smackers in good old one dollar bills! And brand new! Lying quietly a few feet beneath their faces I became suddenly suspicious.

"Is it queer?" I asked and crinkled one of the notes between my fingers.

The one with the biggest head looked up from the copy of "Gone With The Wind."

"It shouldn't be," he said nonchalantly. "We got them out of the U.S. Treasury vaults in—what did you call it?—oh, Washington."

I went through the floor.

Piles of books accumulated. Luckily I had my own apartment, so nosy chambermaids never interfered. The only thing that got interfered with was my private life. They monopolized my time, got me to quit my job and alienated my girl. It was awful. When I came home one night with the ring she threw in my face, I looked the mob squarely in their excuses for faces. They were a bit ashamed.

"But why?" I cried, burying my head in my arms.

They gazed at me stonily then.

"It was necessary. It is all in the rules."

I looked up angrily.

"What rules?"

"The underlying rules."

The heads swayed smugly. I picked

up a book and threw it at them. It went past the row harmlessly.

"Underlying what?" I asked, dropping helplessly back to the bed.

One of them started to talk in Russian. He was quickly slapped down. The biggest of the heads cocked one of its eyes at me.

"Everything," he said. "Everything."

From the moment they began giving me money I never wanted for comfort. I even failed to appear for several days after this and I began to feel that the visitation was over. When I woke suddenly the fourth night, I realized immediately that what I had done was O.K. by them. They proved it by coming back. They looked carelessly at the bookcases.

"You have bought us no new books," said one, wagging a finger at me.

I lit a cigarette and put one arm under my neck.

"I have been moving. I apologize. What do you want?"

"Books." A dozen mouths formed the word.

I became irritated.

"I am grateful for everything you have done," I stated, "Yes, even the bad things, like taking my girl away and making a damn slave out of me. I have always wanted comfort and now I've got it! Books on every subject, books covering all the phases of earth life. Those," I pointed disdainfully with my cigarette at the stocks of books in their cases along the walls, "are a drop in a vast bucket."

They looked down at me disapprovingly.

"No," they said. "It is not in the rules."

I WAS happy until they told me why they were going to all the trouble of acquainting themselves with the psychology of earth-men. I blew up.

"You fools!" I cried, screaming with laughter. "What could you do with the planet? Enslave it? The rich have done that already. Dissect a billion bodies? Go to our hospitals. They do it every day. Dig for diamonds? Shall I make you some?" I roared on: "Perhaps you are hungry for green cheese. Go to the moon. I guarantee it to be fresh and untouched by the hand of man."

A dozen heedless fingers turned over page 242 of Oswald Spengler's "Decline of the West" and twenty-four eyes began reading the top of page two hundred and forty-three.

"Come with me," I urged, still rocking with mirth. "Let me take you into the homes of the people of the earth and show you life as they live it. You shall hear the screaming of women in labor, the ticking of the feet of roaches on the bare plaster of walls, the scrape of worn-out shoes on patched carpet, a thin gasp in darkness as love is fulfilled and the crest of the wave breaks on the rocks of poverty. Hover with me over the squares of this teeming metropolis and observe the scurrying lines emerging from nowhere and vanishing in obscurity. Feel with me the texture of the skins of a hundred thousand women of the night, listen for the breath in their whispered words which should be happiness but in reality is sandpaper on scalded tongues. My friends, listen. It is madness to want us, insanity to imagine that you harbor the notion. Preserve your reason. Go home. Go home. Surely the earth is but a footstool to heaven, a mere step on your ladder

of success. My friends . . ."

Calmly the busy fingers turned page two hundred and sixty-three. They were fast readers.

I shrugged my shoulders, winced at a sudden pain in the small of my back and put out the cigarette by crushing it against the bed spring cross-bar.

I went to sleep.

There was only one direction in which to move—forward. And up I went. First the swankier apartment, then still another and still another. Finally I bought a large residence on Riverside Drive and made it my castle. Theirs, too. The stacks of books grew to overwhelming proportions. They flowed out of the cases onto the floors everywhere. The basement was crammed, the attic door was locked. To have unlocked it would have started an avalanche. The only room in the house relatively free was the bathroom.

I advanced socially, culturally, politically. The goblins were vaguely pleased at my rise in the world. Somewhat amusedly they watched my slow advance from businessman to alderman to mayor to state senator. Their mouths took on crinkles when I related my speeches and told of my great successes in beating down the opposition. The night I was elected to Congress I gave a little party.

They were honest and sentimental. Somehow they understood the reason for the celebration and what lay behind the reason and, in a sense, participated. They engaged in the little feast by keeping decently quiet when I wanted to talk and answering when requested.

IN the huge living room of my house, attired in a rich lounging robe, smoking a pipe which I held in one hand and drinking a Tom Collins which I held with the other, I sat in a deep, comfortable armchair and surveyed the scene. The familiar one. A dozen heads, the apex of a dozen spindly bodies, feet resting lightly on the floor, arms akimbo in most cases, folded in others.

I raised my glass

"To me," I shouted, "and why not?"

"Why not?" remarked the biggest-headed one tonelessly. "It is all in the rules."

I ignored his redundancy.

"Yes, to me, to me because of my success and to you, my dear ones because you made it possible." I drank deeply and set the glass down. I looked up. A grave smile was upon their countenances.

"Ummmmmm," I noised. "What's up?"

The group grew mournful. Their glow increased and cast dancing shadows about the room. They elongated and became taller. I felt suddenly a chill blowing through the room.

The tiniest headed one moved forward and stopped a foot away from my outstretched feet.

"We shall do it soon," he said, working his thin jaws up and down almost comically.

"It?"

"The conquest. We shall take you. All of you."

"Oh." My heart sank. "Is there nothing that can be done about it?"

"Nothing you could do about it."

I smoked my pipe silently for awhile.

"I want you to know that I have

enjoyed my association with you," I said, looking up and gazing at them sadly.

They all crowded closer.

"So have we," they said mournfully and backed away again.

"And there is nothing that can be done about it?" I asked needlessly. I was aware of their power.

The heads swung back and forth ponderously in the negative.

"When do you plan to begin? How will you do it?"

"Within a week," said the biggest-headed one, "and it will not be pleasant."

"It will be painful?"

"It will be painful, but it will be in the rules."

I left them for awhile, went upstairs and fingered my gun. Presently I put it away and shook my head. Then I returned and continued the odd merrymaking and finally went to bed and dreamed peacefully.

I had six days to work in, and in three I considered almost a thousand separate plans for circumventing theirs. All were fantastic and impossible. I was clinging to the final silly notion I conjured up, when all of a sudden a practical idea hit me and knocked me utterly sane. Of course!

I got them interested in poker. They were a funny lot as you may have guessed and, suspecting nothing, enjoyed the game. We used real money as stakes, which was somewhat silly because as soon as one of them was cleaned out (which was almost always due to my own cleverness) he would merely materialize a newly printed, freshly wrapped stack of bills and continue playing.

Simultaneously I fed them on Arthurian legend and tales of chivalry until suggestion had strengthened

their already strong sense of honor.

The fifth night I began the fatal game.

The game started out very early in the evening and I lost heavily according to plan. The progress of the game left me poorer and poorer. I watched their faces carefully as it went on. Slowly they were becoming enthusiastic, acquiring the instinct of the true poker player which is to continue through dawn and beyond. Their faces became radiant, eagerly each one waited for the next hand to begin. I played them carefully, noting the rise of excitement. When I judged them ready, I reached for the cards.

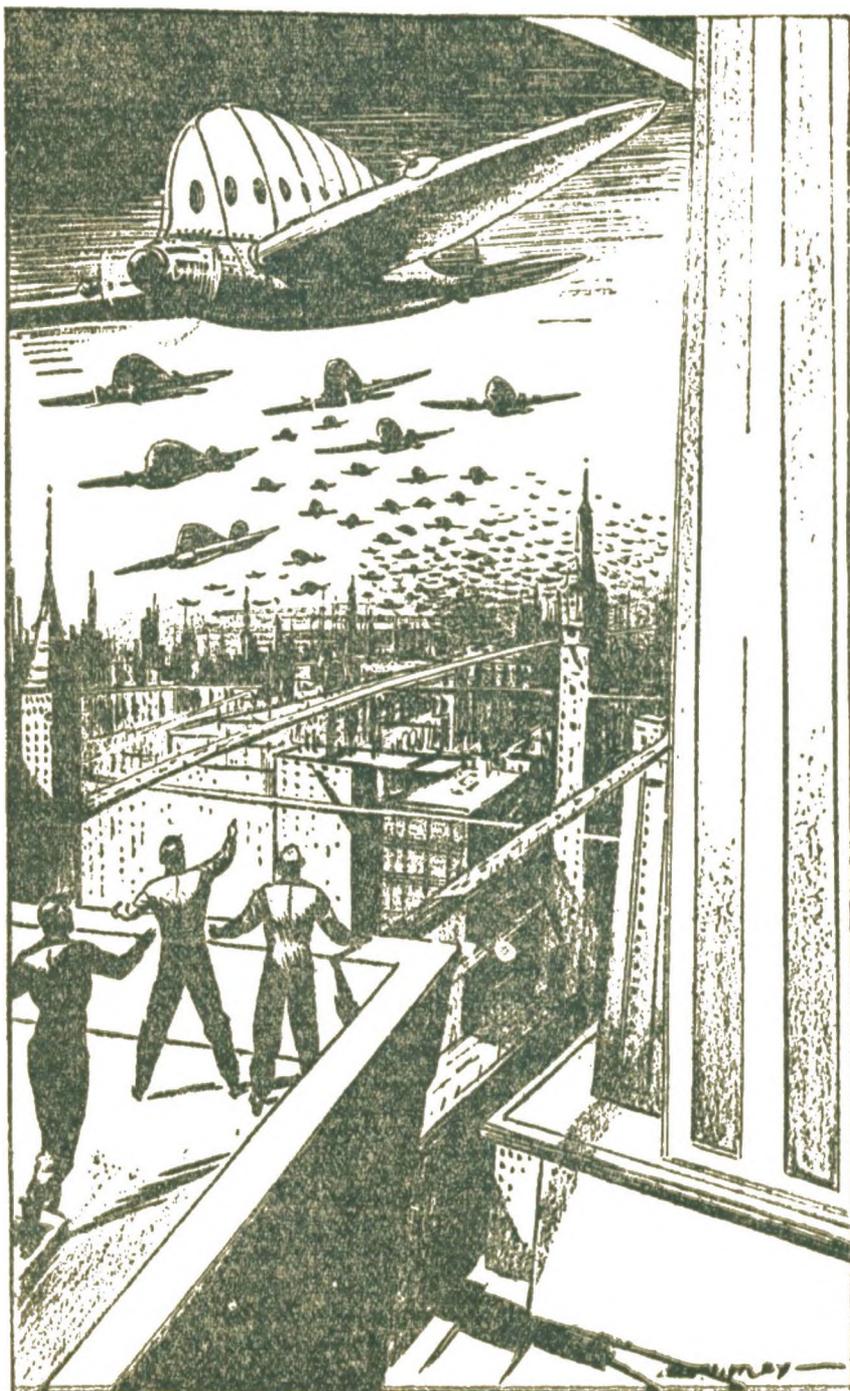
Due to the limitations of the cards, only six hands were possible, two goblins to a hand, two watching, impatient to rejoin the game — they were taking turns staying out—and the fifth hand to myself. I dealt the cards slowly. I picked my hand up and raised my eye to see them considering their own.

The fourth goblin to my left opened. He tossed a thousand dollars into the pot. Everyone followed suit except the biggest-headed one and the smallest headed one who were playing together and dropped. When they finished drawing I gave myself the other two kings I had carefully placed in position in the deck and settled back in my chair. The opener carefully considered his hand and bet. The other joined and I tossed the required money to the center of the table. Presently everyone dropped out of the game except the opener and myself. He bet a sum equivalent to what I had left. I let this pass and then suddenly raised.

"The earth and its people," I said.

"What's that?" They all looked at

(Continued on Page 100)



# MECANICA

A COMPLETE NOVEL

By **FRANK EDWARD ARNOLD**

(Author of "City of Machines," "The Twilight People," etc.)

The world of the Thirtieth Century was a world of monstrous confusion. Kellogg's time explorers were trapped in a jungle of man-hunting machines!

*Illustration by Morey*

## CHAPTER I

"**W**HAT did you mean, Kellogg, by 'different worlds'? Was it just a metaphor, or were you hinting at something?"

Dr. Kellogg, flushed and a little excited at being the lion of the occasion, glanced with pleased surprise at Lyle, the speaker in the big arm-chair, and at the ring of friendly, interested faces about him. A precise, academic, self-sufficient man, he had realized rather late in life that social success is as valuable to the man of science as to any other. Without the backing of these men, whom at first he had met rather against his will, he would never have made the Time Expedition on which he had set his heart. Enjoying this new sensation, he flourished his pince-nez with a nervous little gesture and beamed round.

"The words slipped out inadvertently during my speech, gentlemen," he addressed the well-dined and wined members of the Scientific Exploration Society. "Frankly, I had not meant to speak of it, for the memory

of what I saw is too terrible. But our friend Pascoe brought it up. What a magnificent speech it was! What a magnificent picture he drew of the triumphant civilization of the twenty-fifth century! I cannot blame him or my other colleagues for believing that Man of those far-off days to come had reached a peak of progress from which he will never fall. But — gentlemen, I saw the fall. I remained in charge of the timesphere while they explored the twenty-fifth century for their allotted forty-eight hours, and at that time I could not stand the inaction. I took a swift flight for a further five hundred years, and there I saw it all."

"Saw what, man?"

"I saw not merely the fall of that wonderful civilization which Pascoe has described, but the terrible aftermath of it. I saw such a world as you have never imagined in your wildest nightmares, a world of monsters as were never imagined in the wildest mythologies. That was my 'different world.'"

"Remarkable!" ejaculated Pascoe, who was in the group, "why didn't

you tell us about it then, Kellogg?"

Kellogg smiled faintly.

"Physical courage is not one of my virtues, Pascoe. You and the others are spirited men. Had I told you of this world, undoubtedly you would have explored it. Undoubtedly you would have perished in it. It is, or it will be, a world for men of action, not men of academic science. So I kept quiet and came back with you all to the safety of our own twenty-first century. I prefer to remain in this peace and quiet, having made a successful time flight, and to forget about the horrors I saw at the end of it. I will ask you gentlemen to forget about it as well."

"Here, hold on!" cried Lyle, for Kellogg was settling into an arm-chair with cigar and liqueur as if his story were over. "You can't get away with only half a story, even if it is a blood-curdler. What sort of a world was it? What were these alleged monsters? And the inhabitants? Were they dome-headed intellectuals with thumping big brains, or civilized insects, or just plain cannibals? Or what?"

"Yes, just what?" drawled the jovial Arctic explorer Farren. "Let's have the rest of the story, Kellogg."

Kellogg gestured again with his pince-nez.

"I'd tell you willingly. But how can I expect you to believe what I saw when I can scarcely believe it myself? How can I give you a reasonable explanation when I don't understand it either? I tell you, all that chaos was indescribable. It had to be seen to be believed."

"Oh, we'll believe you," asserted Farren cheerfully. "After that Time Expedition of yours we're ready to believe anything. Just give us some-

thing—a vague inkling, a rough outline, general impressions—but for God's sake don't keep us in suspense."

Kellogg smiled at the other man's enthusiasm.

"Very well, since you insist. But no more than a vague general impression, for that is all I can give you. That world of the thirtieth century will be a world of wholesale anarchy, a world of battle, murder and sudden death. You could not imagine a more terrible contrast to the glories of the twenty-fifth century. Yet, I suppose it was to be expected. I have very little faith in the human race. Man boasts of his achievements. He can build great cities, master great problems, control great forces; he can create great music and great literature; he thinks that he is Lord of the Universe. But when it comes to a crisis—and the things I saw in the thirtieth century prove this conclusively — Man is no more than a helpless insect, the sport of chance, the prey of forces that he can never hope to control. That is my impression of what I saw; and from it I come to the inevitable conclusion that Man is doomed."

"**RUBBISH!**" snapped a hard voice.

The little group in the corner of the crowded clubroom looked up in surprise and Kellogg looked around indignantly — to meet the uncompromising glare of Carl Janning, ace of explorers, who loomed up like a granite monolith behind Farren's rolling bulk. Janning's eyes glistened frostily. Kellogg bristled. The Doom of Man had been his pet idea for twenty-five years.

"And what do you mean by that discourtesy?" he demanded.

"Just what I say," replied Janning brusquely. "You bellyaching book-worms give me a pain. I've read some of the trash you turn out—Man is a failure. Man is doomed, Man will perish and all the rest of it. But we'll go on in spite of it. Man, let me tell you, is cock of the walk, and there are no forces in this world or any other that we cannot control if we put our backs into it."

"That's a matter of opinion. But I have seen and I know you are wrong. No men could survive in the world that I saw."

"Men like **you** couldn't!" Janning's tone was contemptuous. "But I mean **men**. Give me an expedition of my own picking, lead us to this world of yours and we'd guarantee to make hash of it."

"No doubt you would, I maintain that in the thirtieth century your fine expedition would not survive twenty-four hours, but since that cannot be proved I will keep that opinion to myself."

"You know damned well it can be proved. Why don't you come straight out with it, Kellogg? You've been fishing for someone to back you for a second time flight all the evening, haven't you?"

"Well, er—I," Kellogg fumbled awkwardly, flustered by the other's embarrassing directness. Janning dissembled with a mirthless grin.

"Sure, you want backing. Don't blame you for wanting it, but why the hell don't you say so? No need to pitch an elaborate yarn to get us all interested. I'll go before the Board of Directors myself, if you like, and get five other backers to go with me to arrange an expedition on the same terms as before—flight to the future in the Kellogg time-chamber and forty-eight hours of re-

search when we get there. Suit you?"

"Very good of you to offer it," said Kellogg, slightly mollified, "and now that you force me I'll admit I was sounding the company for such support, so I'll take your offer. But take it from me—there will be no forty-eight hours of research. I meant what I said about that world of the thirtieth century and whatever you think of my opinions I stand by the facts. If we are foolish enough to quit the time-stream for actuality we shall be lucky if we survive those forty-eight hours."

"I'll take a bet on that," said Janning largely.

"Hm. I'm not a rich man but I have my means—about as much as you have. I'll take two-thirds of them on the outcome of this expedition. If you win you're welcome to them, if not—well, I won't live to collect."

"So you lose either way — your money or your life. You've got more stuffing in you than I thought." Janning's tribute, if not lavish, was ungrudging. Kellogg smiled, a little wearily.

"I'm an elderly man and I've realized my life's ambition. I shall die, if I have to, without regrets. But it is a pity to see a promising young fellow like you throw his life away with all that promise unfulfilled."

"Damn that!" Janning hated expressions of sentiment; they hit at that streak of tenderness that was buried deep in his hard nature. "I'll collect six volunteers from this group here, a crew of technicians for the time-chamber, outfit the lot and we'll be ready to start within a month."

"Excellent. But—" and there was no ignoring the sober seriousness in

Kellogg's tone, "I warn you solemnly that you are taking your lives in your hands."

Janning grunted.

"They'll never be in safer hands."

## CHAPTER II

**K**ELLOGG'S time-chamber was a colossal affair, a great travelling college, laboratory, living space and expeditionary headquarters combined. Travelling? Yes, it travelled, not on land or sea or in the air but down the great, mysterious river of Time, which of all men until the twenty-first century only Kellogg had learned to navigate.

It was also a travelling hangar, for there was space enough to bring along Janning's big airplane. This was a twin-engined Army bomber, without bomb-racks or gun-emplacements but with a transparent nose for the bomber-observer. The explorer had told the fearful Kellogg in no uncertain terms that he meant to explore, and the monoplane was for that very purpose. He had gathered together a formidable group of men for the expedition: Farren, conqueror of the Arctic; Pascoe, from the first time expedition, who knew the jungles of the world as other men knew their own back streets; Captain Overlin, crack pilot of the world's air lines; Colonel Gundry, military expert of the Scientific Exploration Society. Masters of mighty forces, men who could conquer any exotic, futurian world if any men could. But so far the world of which Kellogg stood in such awe had proved, from aerial observation, to be a very mild and uninteresting place.

"There's a hell of a lot of life in this dump," grouched Janning, indicating the dreary plain below with

an impatient gesture. "Are you sure it's the right time, Kellogg? Or were you having nightmares last time you were here?"

"The last time was the same time," Kellogg smiled. "But the place is a little different—about two hundred miles away."

"Then we should be nearly there," put in Farren, joining them where they stood near the pilot's cabin. "We've been out forty minutes and this is a pretty fast machine. Know any landmarks, Kellogg?"

"I remember a chain of mountains as big as the Rockies and a broad, sluggish river. But aside from nature, it was the manmade things I shall never forget — hullo, there's the mountain chain already."

He was gazing ahead as he spoke, over the shoulder of the pilot Overlin who was lifting the ship gradually for the climb ahead. The other men came up and followed his gaze, admiring the line of majestic peaks ahead. Except for Janning.

"I hope to hell there'll be action over those hills."

"Oh, you'll get your action, my friend! Kellogg spoke edgily. "I am only sorry I have to be there to share it with you."

The climb was steep and the range was broad. From the fast rush over the desert Overlin had to slow the machine down, and it was nearly half an hour before the peaks were crossed. Descending the opposite slope, they saw it all.

"A city!" muttered Janning.

"Quite a big one," said the cheerful Farren, "and at first sight it is rather like the New York of our time. Eh, Gundry?"

Gundry, who had never seen New York, nodded affirmation.

It was the same familiar vista of high-piled towers soaring to the heavens like yells of triumph; the same atmosphere of roaring, frightening, half-nightmare fantasy, of a world where things were too big to be true. The same city of brawling life and lusty materialism that civilization had seen all over the world for ages. It was a twin city to New York—possibly it was New York, changed through the centuries. Larger, perhaps, for the glistening towers averaged two or three thousand feet in height, and it stretched away as far as the eye could see down a valley between two great chains of mountains, in the centre of which flowed the broad green river.

“SO this is your world of monsters, is it?” grunted Janning, disgusted.

“It is.” The others were too absorbed in the scene below to notice that Kellogg’s face had lost color, that he clenched his fists till the knuckles showed white.

“Then it’s a flop. A frost. I came here to get action, not easy money. What a hell of a place to find that!”

Overlin had cut the throttle and now the monoplane cruised at about five hundred feet over the higher towers. The roar of the city below soared up like subterranean thunder—pounding of great factories, deep booming roar of powerhouses, the scream and rattle of giant locomotives and high-power auto engines, shriek of sirens, whistles, loudspeakers, crash and thunder of machinery of all kinds and sizes, sending clouds of black or billowing white smoke into the air. Sight and sound combined to create the vision of a mechanical hell.

Pascoe, who had been sprawling

full-length in the observation post in the nose, came back suddenly to the others, excited and perplexed.

“There’s something peculiar about all this,” he said, frowning. “Take a look through these glasses, Farren, and see if you can make it out. I’m damned if I can.”

“Neither could I,” murmured Kellogg inaudibly. He closed his eyes and made a gigantic effort to control himself. When he opened them again he was calm—calm with resignation and fatalism. Farren took Pascoe’s binoculars and surveyed the street below.

Seen in closeup, the ant-like throngs in the canyons of the city were shown to comprise a horde of mighty traffic. There were automobiles there, thousands of them, great torpedo-shaped things the size of locomotives and bigger, travelling like iron whirlwinds. There were variations in sizes and colors but all were of the same design—streamlined, bodies enclosed, wheels hidden, no windows or windshields . . .

“You’re right, Pascoe. There is something peculiar about all this. But I can’t make it out at all.”

Voices in the cabin were silent for a space, as the puzzled men scanned the hectic scene beneath, trying to figure out what queer element made it strange—different, from the normal scenes of humanity.

“No men about!” ejaculated Gundry suddenly.

For a moment the words of the usually uncommunicative soldier did not register. Then Janning exploded.

“What’s that?”

He seized the binoculars Gundry passed him and joined Farren. In the shifting kaleidoscope below there were buildings, traffic, machines moving and speeding. But Gundry was right. There were no men about. The

broad sidewalks flanking the motorways were empty. The buildings that should have been thronged with incomers and outgoers showed no such signs of life.

"And if there were men inside those cars," muttered Farren, "they couldn't possibly see where they were going."

"May I be damned," commented Janning.

They were silent for a while, trying to accept and believe the phenomenon before their eyes. Trying to explain it. Here was a complex mechanical civilization of a familiar type; with no one to work it; and it worked. How on earth was it done? Why was it done? What did it mean? Who was responsible for it? There must be men somewhere—what sort of men? Who—what—how—

"There goes the Homicide Squad," said Gundry.

They were speeding down the centre of the broad motorway, ten of them in perfect pair formation. Motorcycles. Two-wheeled machines, all enclosed, without saddles, handlebars—or riders.

"Hell's teeth!" swore Janning. In two words he expressed the astonishment and incredulity of the whole group. Here was proof positive that the city of the thirtieth century was a phenomenon without parallel. This was not merely a collection of automatic machines doing commonplace tasks in doublequick time but a whole civilization of machines, apparently working by themselves, possibly for themselves. There was no sign of the men who should be their masters. It was new. It was baffling; and it baffled the Kellogg time expedition to a man.

"Cut the altitude, Overlin, and let's

get a closer look," ordered Janning. Overlin tipped the plane over and sideways for a fast spiral descent, with a calculating eye on the soaring towers at hand.

**T**HAT sideslip saved their lives.

A deafening concussion tore at eardrums, sent the monoplane rocking crazily sideways and down. Three more explosions followed in rapid succession and in an instant Overlin found himself fighting for life in a machine almost out of control. The world hurtled upward. The monoplane streaked for it, nose down, straight for the broad expanse of a flat roof below. Overlin heard shouts of alarm back of him, the crash of big men thrown about like ninepins and the shattering of glass. Before a last despairing heave on the stick he caught a brief glimpse of the grim black muzzle of a four-inch anti-aircraft gun pointing upwards. Then bullets tore through the walls, smashed instruments on the dashboard.

Janning saw Overlin jerk convulsively and fall helplessly sideways. He moved too fast to think; one blow flung the pilot out of his seat and Janning was in his place, iron hand clamped over the stick. The monoplane hauled gradually out of its fearsome dive. Janning saw the huge expanse of roof before him and settled for a landing. Bullets still smashed and tore through the walls of the plane.

The cabin echoed to the shattering of metal and glass and cries of injured men. Provisionally a concrete blockhouse loomed up ahead at the side of the roof and Janning ruddered the plane in its direction to get shelter from the murderous gunfire. As the uproar of it died down he

braked and cut the motors.

The cabin was like a slaughter-house. The faces of Pascoe and Farren had been slashed by flying glass and fairly poured blood. Gundry nursed and cursed a bullet-riddled arm and shoulder, in which bones had been saved only by a miracle. Kellogg lay unconscious, blood oozing from his left arm, leg and temple. Overlin was dead.

"The swine!" roared Farren through blood-dripping lips. "Shooting without provocation! Shooting at falling, helpless men! My God, we'll make 'em pay—"

"Come and sew yourself up," said Janning abruptly, striding down the glass-littered cabin to the small compartment at the rear. He unlocked the door and tugged out a chest with a red cross on it. Needing no advice, Pascoe and Farren set to work repairing injuries, luckily no more than flesh wounds. Gundry and Pascoe between them tended the unconscious Kellogg. They were too busy to notice Janning, the only man uninjured, and it was not until Kellogg was brought around and his injuries bandaged that they realized he had left the machine. He was back an instant later, and he called to Col. Gundry.

"There's a piece of artillery on the corner of this roof, soldier, and three machineguns, mounted along the parapet. We're hidden by the blockhouse and beyond their angle of fire, so I'm getting revenge while the getting's good." He led the soldier to the rear of the plane, showed him a row of crates bolted to the floor. "I came prepared for trouble. Automatics, high-power rifles and ammunition aplenty for every man. And if that's not enough—"

He took a crowbar and prised open a crate at the end, to reveal a neat

honeycomb arrangement inside holding numbers of small steel eggs.

"Mills bombs, begad!" ejaculated the soldier.

"Yes, beauties. Take a couple and fill this bandolier with 'em, then come along with me."

IT was windy out here on the roof and the two men hugged the wall of the blockhouse closely. Janning dragged with him a small empty crate as well as the formidable object in his other hand. At the corner he stopped and turned to Gundry, still pressing himself to the wall.

"Take a look round the corner," he hissed, "and for God's sake be careful."

The soldier, wise in the warfare of jungle and desert as well as that of more civilized places, went down on his belly and hauled himself easily to the corner. There were the three machineguns, mounted on the parapet as Janning had said. Some way distant stood the four-incher, ready to belch hate again at aerial trespassers. The muzzles of the machineguns nosed in the direction of the two men, moving in slow arcs, uncannily like hunting dogs nosing out a scot. There were no human crews to operate them.

"Looking for us," said Gundry.

"I know. You've a bomb in each hand, haven't you? I'll divert their fire, then you take the two nearer ones and I'll take the other. Then we'll go after the big fellow."

Gundry was on his feet again. With a swift movement, Janning heaved the crate skyhigh over the roof of the blockhouse. The gunmuzzles reared high, vomiting flame. It was a gift of a target and the two men went after it vengefully. Just in time to dodge the concussion they sprang

back into shelter, to hear the sweet crash of explosions and sudden cessation of fire.

Gundry seized bombs from the bandolier, passed two to Janning and helped himself. Round the corner they saw that two of the guns had vanished and the third lay overturned, still spurting bullets like a wounded snake spitting venom. Gundry gave it another bomb, feeling oddly that he was putting it out of its agony, and then with vindictive determination they went after the big gun.

The bombardment smashed it to pieces. Janning snarled with joy as the gun went up, shook his fists in exultation. But not for long. Fire converged from the roofs of buildings nearby on to the scene of the explosions and the two men dived for shelter again.

"This is a hell of a place to be marooned in," Janning snarled. His teeth were bared in a mirthless grin and his eyes glittered. Gundry looked at the man, recollected the rumor that Janning had once killed a tiger with nothing more than his hunting knife, and believed it. Janning did not merely lust for battle; he lived for it, and he'd found it.

"Tight spot," admitted the soldier. Guns, large and small, could be heard nearby and in the distance, staccato accompaniment to the roar of the great city. Abruptly voices were heard, huge voices, gigantically magnified through a thousand loudspeakers.

"We are at war!" thundered the voices, "War, war, war, war—"

"Action, thank god!" hissed Janning. He ground his teeth, clenched a sinewy fist and smashed it against the other palm. Gundry shrugged.

"Just another job of work. Hullo!

Look over there!"

He pointed over the broad expanse of the roof, out to the surrounding maze of towers to where a tower reared beside another great expanse. From open doors in the tower poured a long black stream of aircraft, big monoplanes, fast and formidable. Other doors clanged open, more machines joined the great swarm that swung out in a curving line over the river. Janning stared hard.

"Hell!" he said at last. "Let's eat."

### CHAPTER III

IT was, in effect, a council of war.

Kellogg sat on an empty bomb-crane, leaning against the wall of the blockhouse, pale but determined. Gundry sat under the monoplane's wing, fingering his trim gray mustache and looking serenely untroubled. Pascoe's face was a criss-cross of sticking-plaster. Farren's was almost hidden behind a single bandage. Each man was in sole command of his own department of the expedition, but Janning, as sponsor, was nominally in command of all, and in the emergency he took the centre of things without effort.

"If we get away from here it will be on foot," he declared, "the plane is shot to pieces and the fuel tank is a sieve. In any case we could never take off without being shot at from every angle."

He gestured widely to indicate the windy expanse of the roof where the expedition sat marooned. It was as broad as the deck of an aircraft-carrier and just as exposed. It would be impossible to take off from it without being detected and undoubtedly shot at.

"Pascoe says we have provisions enough to last for a week, with care, and enough armament to chuck our weight about if we have to. I propose we make our way back to the time-chamber—we'll have all our work cut out to do that alone. Question is, what are we up against? Any ideas?"

There was silence, and men looked from one to another, troubled, questioning. The problem that a few hours of whirlwind action had blotted out of their conscious minds surged up again. What was the nature of the alien world they had found? Who were its rulers—why had they attacked—Farren spoke up.

"It seems to me that this is a sort of mechanical utopia such as our scientific romancers wrote about a thousand years ago. We see hordes of unmanned machines in operation, obviously done by remote control. The men of this age have lifted the curse of toil entirely from their backs and are now devoted to science and art. That is why we see nothing of them."

"We shall find," he concluded, "that the majority of them are buried away in their laboratories and colleges, while a few technicians supervise the machines. I propose that we hunt out the authorities, or council, or whoever is in office and tell them who we are and what we want. We have all our diplomatic credentials with us."

"They wouldn't recognize them if they saw them," declared Janning. "We are in a world a thousand years removed from our own. Within an hour of arrival here we are attacked without warning, and having taken our just reprisals we hear they are at war. Where are we going to find the men we can't see? What are we

going to do with them if they act like that? What can we expect from them after what we've had? No, I tell you, if we want to get out of here alive we shall have to fight our way—every inch of it."

"Big proposition," murmured Gundry, who knew war and warfare.

"But surely there was some mistake," objected Farren. "I'm sure that if we appealed to the right people—"

"No good, Farren," it was Kellogg who interrupted. "Before we started I warned you all of the odds you were challenging. This is your world of monstrosities, Janning. Explain it if you can. Take it. I wish you joy of it."

"Thanks," Janning glared. "We've smashed four of your monstrosities already, and we'll smash the whole damned place if we have to. Pascoe, which way to the time-chamber?"

"We approached the city from the west. When we were shot down we were close to the river, probably we are near the waterfront now. Our obvious plan is to get down to street level and make our way to the mountains by road, always assuming we are not stopped by the police on our way."

"We won't be stopped by police here," murmured Kellogg, "this is a world of anarchy, my friends, anarchy and sudden death."

"Shut up, you pessimist," said Farren, goodnaturedly. "I dare say this is quite a rational world when once you get the hang of it."

"No," Kellogg sighed fatalistically. "there is something that makes me believe that the true facts of this world are altogether wilder and more horrible than any rational explanation. Cars without drivers; motorcycles without riders; guns shooting

at you of their own accord—"

His voice died away and his eyes closed. In the brief silence that followed a cold, faint chill crept over the other men, chill of another, alien and monstrous world.

"Hell!" roared Janning, voice exploding like a gunshot, "this is a time and place for action, not maudlin speculation. We've a tramp of two hundred miles in front of us and God knows how many fights for life. We will never survive a day if we sit here drivelling like this."

"I gave you two days to survive." Kellogg was smiling again. "It seems I was generous. It's no good, Janning. We are doomed—mere helpless insects amid monsters of iron and steel."

"Helpless!" Janning's teeth bared. "Come on, Gundry, we've got to make an army out of these cripples."

Between them they hauled out the crates and cases of armament. There was a powerful Service rifle and two revolvers for each man, and bandoliers to carry ammunition and bombs.

"Provisions here for a clear week," said Pascoe, stowing tins into their packs. "We prepared for a stay of forty-eight hours and a big margin of safety. This ought to see us through."

"If not we'll take to cannibalism," was Janning's rejoinder.

The odd little army was ready and equipped. The assortment of bandages and civilian clothes, save for the uniformed Gundry, made queer contrast with the formidable array of weapons. But the weapons were in good hands. Janning, Gundry, Pascoe and Farren were hard-living, hard-bitten men accustomed to danger and threatened death, and even the sedentary Kellogg had had service experience in his younger day and could

carry a gun smartly.

"One more thing," said Farren, as the expedition gathered around the cabin door of the monoplane. "What about Overlin?"

"I laid out his body and covered it," said Pascoe. "We'll have to leave him here in the plane. We might fire it and cremate him, in lieu of a decent burial."

"That would bring half the local air force down on us," Janning said. "We've done him what honors we can—come on."

A CAUTIOUS examination beforehand had shown that the only exit was through a green-painted door at the further end of the block-house, which opened into a cage-like room that was clearly an elevator. When the door closed of its own accord behind them there was no sense of motion to follow, and for five silent, restless minutes they wondered if it were not a kind of trap. But then a door opened suddenly and a deafening uproar overwhelmed them. The rhythmic thunder of big machines was punctuated by the rattle and clatter of smaller and the pounding of wheeled transport. The din rasped uncomfortably upon the men's ears and they gritted their teeth. Gathered around outside the door of the elevator they surveyed the scene, hands hovering over gunbutts.

The place was huge and in clear daylight, though there were no windows in the wall nor sign of illumination. Long clear avenues stretched between row upon row of roaring machines; wheels spinning, levers clicking, long driving-bands clattering, hundreds of little triphammers rising and falling, metal slugs popping in and out, cogwheels turning, actuating

crankshafts and worm-gears. Machinery everywhere. Rank upon rank of roaring, thundering, clattering machines.

"No men in here either," Gundry raised his powerful voice.

Not an operator nor a supervisor.

They strode down a broad white avenue, Janning in front and the other four spaced in pairs behind each other, a wedge-shaped formation detailed by Gundry giving each man clear vision about him and space to handle his weapons in comfort. They gazed almost in awe at this mechanical wonderland. A heavy rumbling was heard overhead and a travelling crane passed above, bearing a mass of steel. They passed a crossing where rails were sunk into the floor and a train of electric wagons clattered past them. At the end of this avenue, to the left of them, was an open door leading to the open air, and at Janning's indication they made for it.

The factory was built, not on one of the great motorways but in a comparatively narrow side street. The walls of surrounding factories reared up to heights of more than five hundred feet, solid and windowless. Machinery echoed and thundered from within, but the street was empty of traffic. With formation spread out a little the expedition advanced down it in the direction indicated by Pascoe, the acknowledged guide. At the end of the road a few hundred yards away traffic was visible, and beyond that the gleam of the river.

"Get to the river," instructed Pascoe, "then we can locate a main road leading west. Maybe we can get a lift from some driver, if they do those things here."

"Some hopes!" grunted Janning, Halfway down the street the road-

way was under repair. The fiendish roar of pneumatic drills mingled gaily with the general uproar. Drills bit into the paving, cement mixers revolved, road-laying machines advanced. All by themselves. No laborers to handle them, no foreman to supervise.

"This beats me," muttered Farren, "can you make head or tail of it, soldier?"

Gundry was an Army officer of the traditional school whose mental processes ran mainly to the giving and taking of orders. His shrewd commonsense could explain little of the bizarre situation confronting them.

"I believe," said Kellogg, "that we have found a race of intelligent machines. Not humanly intelligent, perhaps, but sufficiently so to perform their allotted tasks without supervision. A blind intelligence, but dangerous for all that. That is what I thought when I first saw them and that is what I feared about them—their intelligence!"

"Bosh!" snarled Janning.

THEY reached the end of the street without interruption or interception. The sidewalk along the embankment was railed off from the roadway by a high steel fence, blocking a full view of the motorway. A ramp led up to what was apparently a pedestrian bridge over the motorway, and ascending this the expedition had its first view of the embankment and the river.

The giant motors thundered beneath them in a never-ending stream at speeds which the twenty-first century would have called dangerous. Down the river proceeded big white streamlined ships of great tonnage, travelling like speedboats. But perhaps the strangest phenomena were

beside the embankment. Ships in dock lay with hatch-covers thrown open. Over them stretched the arms of great cranes, rising and falling, stretching like human limbs, hauling great cargoes from ship to shore. But there were no crews aboard ship, no stevedores to manhandle cargoes or stow them on the driverless trucks that carried them away. No men of any sort, anywhere.

"I believe you're right, Kellogg," Farren's voice shook a little. "There is a weird sort of intelligence about all these machines. What they remind me of I can't quite think, but it's something inhuman."

Janning cursed. Pascoe shouted for attention.

"This road joins a curve of the motorway and bridges across the river. Let's get down to street level again and skirt the embankment till we find a westward road."

The sidewalk along the motorway was broad, and though there was space for thousands of pedestrians there were none save the five expeditionaries.

This sensation of tramping the familiar noisy streets of a big modern metropolis as if they were paths through the depths of the jungle was indescribably weird. The absence of men amid these triumphantly material works was now more or less accepted, but the abnormality of the situation was preying on the minds of more sensitive men like Kellogg, Farren and Pascoe.

"I wonder what goes on inside these things," muttered Farren, indicating the cliff of masonry on their left, rearing hundreds of feet into the air. Gundry shrugged. Kellogg thought what a magnificent sight these towers must present from the

river, but then he thought of that uncanny intelligence within, and shuddered. Of a sudden the expedition was stopped in its tracks by a voice, echoing over the surrounding uproar.

"Calling all cars. Calling all units of the Mobile Squad in Area QX. The incredible report that the aircraft shot down this morning was manned by intelligent beasts is now confirmed. The beasts were observed by cameras to enter Factory QX4 and are now believed to be at large. They are armed, intelligent and dangerous. All squads patrolling Block Ten will throw a cordon and converge. The beasts must be shot on sight."

For a moment the expedition was nonplussed.

"That was a human voice!" cried Farren at last.

"No," Kellogg shook his head. "An inhuman voice. Cold, hollow and mechanical."

"Come on, damn you!" roared Janning. "Don't you see, you fools? Intelligent beasts. Shoot on sight. They are after us!"

Even as they realized it they heard the fierce howl of sirens, the sputtering roar of high-power engines as a Mobile Squad of the riderless cycles came streaking down the road at high speed.

## CHAPTER IV

THERE was just an instant of time for rapid thinking and Janning made the most of it. He yelled to Gundry, who had also spotted the open door in the tower on the corner, and while Gundry herded the other three men within, Janning sprang to the side of the door to cover the retreat.

The Mobile Squad was charging down a secondary road leading into the motorway. Janning saw them coming, saw the revolvers gripped in steel claws at their sides, and his teeth bared in a soundless snarl. His own two guns roared their challenge, ripping up the tires of the foremost machines, sending them skidding. Bullets ricocheted from steel sides. But the second row of cycles carried sub-machineguns mounted in front. Janning dived for shelter as the guns roared and gouts of concrete spouted from the walls about him. No time to stop and stand, though this narrow passage might be held against an army. He heaved at the door, slammed it shut. Gundry seized his arm.

"All right, Janning?"

"O.K., thanks, soldier. Let's get out of here, somehow."

The place was another factory, roaring. Long shafts of steel were borne from place to place by massive travelling cranes. A big wagon rumbled down the central aisle, bearing a mass of shining steel cylinders.

"Munitions, by God!" swore Janning.

"Shell cases. No danger if we shoot."

It was a good place to play cat and mouse in, especially since the mice had fighting power and fighting spirit. In the rush of emergency Kellogg's morbid fancies were forgotten. Time for action. A crash on the door warned them to move fast.

"We're trapped," said Janning with finality. "They've closed a cordon around this block and they're smashing that door in. If we're going to get out we must make our own openings."

"Take the offensive," Gundry said, as the door shook under another smashing blow. "Get 'em into the

open here and attack en masse. Like this."

Swiftly he outlined a scheme while the others listened in breathless haste not unmingled with fear. They had barely time to scatter and take cover in the positions assigned them when the door crashed open and the weird machines of the Mobile Squad, black, glistening things like an army of giant ants, poured into the factory in a roaring, reeking torrent. The five men crouched amid the maelstrom of bellowing machinery, hearts pounding, some with fear, some merely out of breath, one with lust for battle. Avenues were thronged with motorcycles, cruising slowly, sub-machineguns nosing for a target. Near the door they were thick, but at the far end where they had not penetrated, the place was empty. Janning moved, placed a pillar between himself and the nearest advancing machine and lobbed a bomb in a high arc toward the far end. It burst with shattering concussion amid a tangle of wires and wheels that went flying skyhigh. The air quaked to the roar of accelerating engines as angry machines raced for the scene of the explosion. Right into Gundry's trap.

Two more bombs from Janning hit the milling crowd and as more machines tore up the other men joined the bombardment. Motorcycles reared up savagely on one wheel, shrieking like wild beasts wounded. Guns crashed and echoed, wheels and cylinders flew out and flames spouted from burst oil-tanks. More and more of the senseless things came charging down the avenues to join the melee, whirling, roaring, snarling like bloodcrazed animals fighting to the death. The hidden men methodically fed explosive fuel into the hideous bonfire, till Janning caught Gundry's

signal.

"Coast's clear," boomed the soldier's tremendous voice. "Time for retreat, Janning."

The whole of the converging squadrons had been drawn to the battle at the far end of the factory, leaving the door open and unguarded.

**L**EAVING the appalling scene behind them the expedition raced for the open door, horrible noises of battle still ringing in their ears above the pounding of the factory. The side street from which the Mobile Squad had issued was empty, save for the complicated bulk of a machine that was possibly a piledriver. Evidently this was the thing that had battered down the door. It crouched on the sidewalk, throbbing with power in reserve. Janning and Gundry reached for grenades, but the thing made no move toward them.

"We'd better get going," shouted Pascoe. "Down the motorway and away from this block before we're killed. The faster the better."

They set out down the road at a steady jogtrot. There was no pedestrian fence along this stretch and here the men had their first close view of the motorway. It was vast—broad as a ten-track railroad and the streaking autos loomed up gigantic. A ten-ton truck of twentieth century highways would have been dwarfed on the road beside these thundering giants, flying past at speeds of a hundred miles an hour or more. They seemed to be built for nothing but size, power, high speed and taking of heavy strains, for even in rounding the huge, elaborate clover leaf crossing further down the embankment they did not slow down but hurtled round the banking like mad things.

About a quarter of a mile down

the road from Block QX the sidewalk curved in and formed a secondary track to the roadway. In the center of this track a canopy extended outward over a big, garishly painted service station. Cars were parked further along the block. The five men stopped as a huge auto pulled into the secondary track with a screech of brakes, came noisily to a stop beside a row of bright green oil-pumps. A long overhead arm swung out, extended a nozzled pipe into the tanks under the side of the car. Needles rounded the dial on the pump. A noisy little tender pattered out of the station and circled the big car, spraying its dusty sides lavishly. The expeditionaries, their recent peril forgotten, gazed on enthralled.

"Automatic service for driverless cars," cried Farren, and again his mind sought that weird parallel that it could not quite grasp.

"Horrible!" Kellogg shuddered, "and those ghastly things in the factory—" He swayed a little and Farren caught his arm. The man was overwrought and on the point of collapse. But Janning shook him roughly.

"Don't faint yet," he grated, "We are getting into this car first, then you can collapse all you like."

Panel doors banged open in the side of the car and the tender buzzed in. Without hesitation Janning and Gundry went in after it, followed rather reluctantly by the other three. Inside, the huge automobile was as commodious as a whole Pullman coach, though it had none of a Pullman's comfort. Motors and machinery lay everywhere and the place reeked of oil. The walls which looked like steel from outside were now seen to be transparent throughout and the

car was like a travelling glasshouse. The little tender fussed around over machinery, extending cranked arms holding cans of lubricant to oil joints and spanners to adjust nuts and bolts, doing half a dozen jobs at once. Janning watched the thing alertly, guns drawn, ready to shoot it to pieces the moment it showed signs of fight. But it didn't. In a few minutes it buzzed out, the doors clanged shut, the roar of the motors rose to a bel- low and the car moved off smoothly and rapidly.

"We're saved!" shouted Farren. With the sudden snapping of tension his whole stout frame went weak and he leaned against an oil-tank, laugh- ing shakily. Pascoe too was affected and he sank limply to the floor, gasp- ing. Kellogg, surprisingly, was calm again. But he understood the feelings of the others. It was not the danger that had caused the reaction, though that was bad enough. It was the brooding, haunting terror of the un- known that lay everywhere about them and the threats of death in un- knowable, inexplicable forms lurking in a familiar, almost commonplace, setting.

Janning, after a glare of disgust at the others, paced to and fro like a caged lion, muttering to himself. the wide-eyed and innocent calm of Gundry alone retained complete calm, one who did not seriously understand what fear was. Methodically he stack- ed the other men's rifles, stowed ban- doliers of bombs on the rack over- head.

JANNING strode to the front of the car and glared ahead. The mach- ine had now hit the central track and was streaking at high speed. The hor-

izon fairly leaped toward it. Despite its speed of more than one hundred miles an hour, iron monsters over- took and passed it continually, while those on the opposite tracks flashed past like light. The great skyscraping towers flew by, like the prows of giant galleys on a sea of concrete and steel. The journey was wild, exhilar- ating; amid this avalanche of mach- ines Janning felt the surge of joyous fury within him, felt the pounding of his blood, the lust of battle he had felt before when hacking his inexor- able way through many an impene- trable jungle. Man had conquered the jungle, Man had built this colossal city, Man controlled these titanic ma- chines—God, the glory of being a Man! A fighting man in a fighting world! His teeth ground, fists clawed out and clenched as if over an invis- ible throat. Forgotten were the mor- bid croakings of Kellogg, the weird incomprehensibility of this alien world where death lurked round every corner and struck with blind unreason. This was battle, and battle was life.

"Where are we heading for, Pas- coe?" came Farren's voice suddenly. He was calm again, calm as he al- ways was when facing the normal dangers of the Arctic.

"This road runs due north. If the car keeps straight ahead it means we shall have to make a long detour to the southwest when we leave it, un- less we can board another and get a lift as far as the mountains, or even beyond."

It seemed that the city would never end. Fast as the car travelled, the same scene presented itself contin- ually.

Nothing but rearing towers flank-

ing the long, broad river, filling the valley between the rolling mountain chains. Nowhere was there a break in the scene. This congested valley might extend to the ends of the earth. Janning glared fixedly ahead, wondering faintly if the whirlwind ride might take them anywhere near the time-chamber in the end, but more concerned with the immediate possibility of another fight. Abruptly the car hurled itself up the ramp of a crossing, rounded the banking at a fierce angle with screech of brakes and howl of supercharger. The men grabbed stanchions, shouting, as centrifugal force flung them violently off balance. Down another ramp and on the straight again the car headed west.

Farren came to join Janning in the front. The vista before them was magnificent. The western road was even broader than the embankment and led in one straight tower-flanked sweep to the blue mountains in the distance.

"Superb!" murmured Farren. "And now, thank God, we're going westward and toward the time-chamber."

"You're in a hell of a hurry to get away from here," Janning growled, "What's the matter? Afraid of those damned things?"

"I am," Farren, who had killed polar bears in his time, gazed at the other man steadily. "You know I am not a man to take fright easily, but I tell you, this world we have come into has something of the unholy about it. It's wild. It's mad. Look at it now—" he gestured, pointing down the great road ahead, to the great cars whirling on either side, "what's the purpose of all this? Where's the sense of it, all these mad machines

running about like—well, like—"

"Overgrown insects?"

"Insects! That's it!" That was the parallel that Farren's subconscious mind had been seeking. This weird, wild world on wheels was like an enormous and horrible magnification of the world of insects underfoot. The same armor-plated bodies, grim and glistening black, or bright with a polished, satiny lustre. The same scurrying movement hither and thither, the same blind, purposeless efficiency and untiring labor. The same ruthless disregard for life, the utter absence of anything that men call beautiful. A wonderful world. But a world gone stark, staring, raving mad.

"You're right, Farren. This is a hell of a place, but that's just why I am enjoying it. You don't have to go into a funk like Kellogg. We are men, damn it, with men's brains and men's cunning, and men's strength, too. These mad things can chase us and harry us because they outnumber us, but they can never beat us. Brace up, man! We'll have to fight our way—sure we will, but where's the joy of life without a hell of a good fight every now and then?"

Farren laughed, his good humor restored.

"What a man for trouble! Well, you've got your bellyful of it now. If you can take it, so can we."

THE car was nearing the mountains. It roared under the archway of another huge crossing and pressed relentlessly on. The other three men had joined Janning and Farren in the front and were absorbed in the scene ahead.

"Very smooth travelling in this car," remarked Pascoe, "notice there is no bumping or vibration?"

"Except for the noise you might call it peaceful," Farren said. "I wonder where this thing will put us down if it ever does—Ye gods, look at that!" He had suddenly gone rigid. They followed his trembling finger to see the new element that had abruptly entered the now-familiar scene of the machine-world.

Over the western mountains the sky was black with bombers. There was no doubting the identity or the purpose of the terrifying clouds that reared up like a sudden whirlwind over the city. As quick as the eye could follow they rolled over the western outskirts and helldived to earth, and the city rocked to the concussion of ton after ton of high explosive.

There was never an air raid like it. Towers keeled over and toppled in ruin, cars, motors, engines, machines of every shape and size and description flew high in fragments. Death and destruction rained torrents and the car bearing the only living beings in the whole city hurtled straight for the inferno. Kellogg screamed as a hawklike monoplane swooped down on the car, gunfire blazing from its wings. Janning seized him, flung him behind the shelter of a dynamo. The walls split under the impact of explosive bullets, men yelled and dived for cover. Before the car swerved round a bend with screaming brakes to seek shelter, Janning in the front caught a quick glimpse of the fierce, indomitable machines of the Mobile Squads pouring a fire of destruction into the flaming skies.

## CHAPTER V

**T**HE car plunged up a northward road, slowed, turned into a second

dary track and down a ramp leading underground. Motors boomed hollowly in the walls of the tunnel. It came out finally into a great underground park and rolled to a stop. Around it other cars poured in by the hundred. The uncanny intelligence of the machine-world told these senseless things that danger threatened, and some intelligence of their own, perhaps, guided them to safety.

When it seemed that everything was still, five human beings crept out of cover to survey their position. The car was riddled from end to end but only one man was hurt. Janning, hitherto untouched, now blistered the air with cursing as he tore off his clothing to get at a shoulder damaged by fragments of shell. Kellogg, with surprising firmness, pushed him into a sitting position and attended to bandaging the injury, a severe one which would certainly incapacitate Janning's left arm for the rest of the journey. The others collected their scattered belongings, Gundry uttering a silent prayer for the miracle that had saved the store of grenades from flying fragments.

"How do we get out of here?" demanded Janning, between curses.

"Why not stay where we are?" objected Farren. "We're safe enough, and certainly an air raid like that one is too big a handful even for you."

Reluctantly Janning agreed. No one man can fight bombers with rifles and revolvers, and to enter the streets again during a raid on the scale of the present one would be plain suicide.

The auto park was deep underground, but even down here the crescendo of explosions vibrated like a nearby earthquake. It was not merely successive detonations but a long, continuous, echoing roar; and it went

on as if it would never end. An hour passed; two hours; three; towards the end of the fourth the thunder had lessened somewhat in intensity. At the end of the fifth, explosions were heard singly, and the feeble (by contrast) crash of gunfire.

Six hours after the car had gone underground a last shot was heard, followed by sirens above the normal hullabaloo of the city. The five men gazed at each other mutely, questioning, awestruck.

"So that," murmured Farren at last, "is what they meant when they shouted, 'We are at war!'"

"Whoever 'they' may be," Kellogg reminded him.

"Whoever can they be?" Farren's voice was a whisper. Once again a cold chill of silence settled over the little expedition. At first it had not been difficult to shake the mists of unholy atmosphere from their minds, but now, after these demonstrations of the machine-world's tremendous power and incomprehensible purposes the haunting terror surged up again. The who, why, what and how of this appalling world came uppermost in their dazed minds. Danger of known and recognized sources was one thing. A world of murder gone mad was quite another.

Abruptly Janning ripped out a curse that tore across morbid speculation like a slashing knife.

"For God's sake, lie down and sleep it off," he snarled, "We've survived twelve of your forty-eight hours, Kellogg, and we'll survive them all if your nerve doesn't fail you."

"Look after your own nerve, Janning. You're getting excitable, and it won't do your shoulder any good. Take things calmly, as I do."

"Pah!" Janning dragged himself

to his feet, turned to Gundry to arrange for watches to be kept, though there was little chance that anything would surprise them here in the car.

**BY** Pascoe's timepiece the exhausted men slept a full ten hours, aside from two hours each of duty. The rumble of the city overhead, the noise of carpentering and leaving the park, went unheeded. Their own machine never moved. It was ten in the morning by the clock before all were awake and about.

Pascoe unloaded tins of bacon and beans from his pack and a small heater to brew coffee. They ate cheerfully, the strain of yesterday's terror eased out of their systems. They were brewing a second pot of coffee when a grinding clash was heard in the fore end of the car, and simultaneously the engines around began to throb. The car shook and rolled forward swiftly, heading for the exit tunnels.

"We're off!" cried Farren gaily. "Where to, I wonder?"

"To the open air, at any rate." Janning threw back a scalding cup of coffee at one gulp, dropped the cup and reached for his rifle. There was a scurry of general clearance; men stuffed plates and mugs into their packs, reached for their guns and bandoliers of grenades. By the time the car had gained the outer world the time expedition was ready for war again.

The car turned back to the western road it had come from. It was travelling slowly now, with an uneven coughing and jerking in its engine, and instead of making for the central track it kept to the secondary tracks for slow traffic. Some way ahead the men saw that the road was

blocked with debris and impassable. Traffic turned to side roads. The car went off the road altogether at last and chugged into a service station for the repairs it needed. The men stood by the door, rifles slung over their backs and hands at gun-butts. Sure enough the doors banged aside to admit a service tender, and at Janing's indication the expedition filed out. That glimpse of the road had told them that further progress westward must be made on foot.

The destruction wreaked by the raiders was appalling. High explosives of undreamt power had poured a nonstop barrage into the city streets, striking and penetrating to the very foundations of the towers and bringing them down in tumbling ruin, taking others with them in their fall.

Great girders and masses of concrete lay scattered about in heaps of rubble. Cars, the giant autos of the super highways, had been flung about like toys. Here and there amid the debris lay overturned guns and the remnants of Mobile Squad cycles, some of them not entirely shattered but lying about with automatic guns still firing spasmodically, blindly, dangerously. Amongst all this wreckage were many carcasses of burnt-out bombers, of a size that beggared description. The havoc stretched for miles in either direction. The area of the city devastated must have been colossal, the size and numbers of the bombing squadrons that wrought such damage beyond compute. The men of the twenty-first century tried to adjust their blurred, stupefied mental impressions.

"Is it possible," breathed Farren, "that machines could do this—this—all of their own accord? I can't be-

lieve it. Machines are efficient, supremely efficient, and if they evolved intelligence they would be perfectly efficient. But how could they do it? What conceivable motive could they have? Even if machines could have a motive for anything!"

**MORE** machines came up the western road, noisy, cumbersome things, great steamhammers and steamshovels. An overturned tower lay across the roadway, great walls rearing high, an enormous obstacle. The steamhammers spread out in line abreast formation, advanced as one upon the obstacle and struck it with terrific force. It didn't give at first. But under the rhythmic, remorseless bombardment the great concrete wall crumbled, split away and finally collapsed, burying many of its destroyers under it. Some of them emerged, damaged. Some were wrecked. A long line of heavy trucks drew up behind the steamshovels, which advanced in their turn. They ate their way into the wreckage, steel jaws champing, heaved great mounds of stuff into the waiting trucks. Some strained at masses beyond their capacity and broke down but went on working blindly, clumsily, uselessly.

If they had intelligence it was of a low order, for they seemed unaware of anything wrong with their mechanism. Big mobile derricks followed in their wake, extended magnetic steel claws into the wreckage to haul out big girders. The driverless trucks carted away masses of stuff. Some broke down under an overload, but still engines strained uselessly at enormous burdens. When there was enough space through the middle of the shattered tower for them to pick their way the men forged ahead, to-

wards the mountains which were now no more than a mile or so away. They passed through more wreckage, escaping narrowly from many an odd gun that blazed away convulsively from odd points, either with intent or by accident. Through streets fairly clear big derricks hauled away the remnants of colossal bombers. In these clear spaces the work of reconstruction was going on. Machines of weird shapes and all sizes built up a steel skeleton above a tower sliced off in the middle. High overhead great cranes hoisted girders which were taken by tentacular arms from spidery things hanging at odd places. Little wheeled machines ran up and down the fixed girders at all angles, clinging to surfaces like flies, riveting, hammering, drilling, boring. Welding machines spouted livid flames. The air fairly shook to the uproar. Whether destroying or rebuilding itself the machine world remained the same—wild, weird, uncanny and inexplicable.

The city reached its boundaries almost at the foot of the mountains. Here the western road plunged into a high tunnel from which emerged a steady stream of trucks and mobile breakdown machinery, heading for the devastated area. There was no sidewalk into the tunnel and to risk the motorway meant almost certain death under pounding wheels. Accordingly the expedition headed for the south side of the road over a pedestrian bridge and trudged from there along a wide strip of wasteland that edged the foot of the mountains. The going was hard. Rocks, mounds and low hills blocked the way on all sides. The expeditionaries were accustomed to hard going in most parts of the world, but none of them had

had experience of mountaineering.

After a few hours of this heart-breaking, backbreaking effort they were nearing exhaustion. Kellogg, bearing up with silent effort, was white and strained. Farren's huge, stout frame quivered and dripped perspiration. Even the normally tireless Janning began to give, heaving breath through clenched teeth and cursing his throbbing shoulder. The damned thing was weakening him seriously. But they ploughed on desperately, tramping steadily over the even stretches, floundering over piles of rock, stopping now and then to blast their way through obstacles with grenades. Exhausting though the journey was, it was safer and better here than in the bullet-riddled streets of the city; and ever they drew further south and west, to the time-chamber and its competent crew. Hours of struggling brought them at last to a path leading up and into the mountain. With sighs of relief they stretched themselves on the ground to rest and eat.

They remained more than two hours, unmoving. It was growing late into the afternoon of the second day in the mad machine world (the wager for forty-eight hours was long since forgotten) before they resumed their journey, up the mountain pass and to the west, away from the strange, wonderful, terrible city to the comparative peace and safety of the desert, where lay, some two hundred miles away, the time-chamber and their retreat to the twenty-first century. Thought of that, and the easier nature of the road they now travelled, improved the spirits of the expeditionaries immensely and they strode the mountain pass with a swing, almost a swagger.

"We ought to cross these mountains by nightfall," Gundry said as they stopped for a while at the summit of the pass. "By forced marches we may get to the time-chamber in a week or eight days. We shan't be in too good shape at the end of it, but that's the best we can do. Maybe the crew will send out a search party to find us."

Before taking the long easy slope down the further side of the mountain they turned to take a last look at the city, terrible scene of experiences they would never forget to the end of their days. By now the devastated area in either direction was aswarm with salvage and repairing machines, scurrying antlike over shattered buildings, hauling, lifting, carrying, building. Further on the towers of the city still raised their proud heights into the sky as if defiant of invaders, and in the great motorways the traffic flowed in solid streams north and south. But on the river the scene had changed. The ships of commerce were gone and in their place were squadrons of slim, sleek grey shapes from whose decks protruded low streamlined turrets and the sinister barrels of heavy-calibre guns.

## CHAPTER VI

AT a cave at the end of the pass they spent a fairly comfortable night, with a log fire collected from the surrounding brush and scrub of the desert. They had agreed to rise and move on at dawn. But in the chill of the early morning hours, Gundry, who was keeping watch, was surprised by a sudden dull boom of gunfire and the high-pitched whine of shells. Six shots followed in succes-

sion, coming from somewhere up in the mountain. Taking a gun he strode out into the pass to scan the heights.

Gunfire broke out again, high up and a little to the north. Gundry saw angry flashes, saw them break out one after the other in a long rippling far away into the distance. Then guns boomed south of the pass, intermittently at first, then with increasing intensity until the whole line of the mountain chain was ablaze from end to end. The air shook with thunder and lightning, shuddered to the whine of shells. Whoever the enemy was, he was taking punishment from a barrage of tremendous intensity. From where he stood on the pass Gundry could get a rough idea of the artillery's numerical strength by the coruscation of flashes above, and he was convinced that those visible alone must be numbered by hundreds. Before long he was joined by Janning and the others, roused and attracted by the din. The spectacle, even to the men almost inured to the wonders of this world, was awe-inspiring. They questioned, speculated, wondering how this new development would affect their chances of escape. Gundry, who looked at ease or danger with the same emotionless calm, gave small hope.

"There's no getting through a barrage like that," he declared, "we'll have to sit tight until it recedes and the attackers go over. If we follow 'em we may get through whatever is on the other side."

"Attackers!" cried Farren. "Who on earth can be the attackers in a fool of a world like this? Do you think those batteries will break loose and attack, or will it be battalions of those impossible motorbike things?"

Man, my head is going round in circles with all this."

"You're worse off than I am," Kellogg was smiling. "I remember I dreaded returning to this world after seeing such things as we have seen, but now that I'm used to it I find it interesting. Think of the amount of speculation there is in it. It is as plain as a pikestaff that for all of Janning's brag mankind has gone under, to be superseded by these intelligent machines. For we are all agreed that these wonderful things have intelligence. After thinking, I will go even further and say that they have a temperament."

"And how can machines possibly have a temperament?" demanded Farren, the barrage forgotten in the absorption of a possible debate.

"Easily. Remember the quite unintelligent machines of our own world. While kept in order they functioned perfectly, but if anything went wrong, if a speck of grit got into the wheels, the machine went bad. A speeding auto, a controlled, efficient machine, burst a tire and skidded dangerously in all directions, killing and destroying. An airplane would fall out of control, a wild, helpless, destructive thing. A mad machine is terrifying, even the normal unintelligent machine that we know. But when machines evolve an intelligence—and then go mad—well, we have such a world as this."

"Good God! What a thought! But it's as logical as any other."

**T**HE barrage went on for hours before any change was noticeable. It was not definable at first, but by and by a new sound mingled with the crash of guns above, the unmistakable concussion of bursting shells.

The enemy was hitting back and hitting hard. He continued hitting, and both sides pounded away at each other until the sun was well over the mountain peaks. From the cave mouth the men watched the course of battle intently. The prolonged spectacle of bursting explosives grew monotonous, but the tension, the waiting for whatever unguessable danger would spring out next, kept them keyed up at high pitch throughout the whole long vigil. About midday, Gundry, who had been surveying the desert for some sign of the enemy, reported movement on the horizon.

"Can't make out details but there's plenty of 'em," he said. "Coming this way."

It was a vague dark cloud in the distance that resolved itself soon into a host of shifting specks. Before long they were identifiable as moving vehicles. They enlarged rapidly and were seen to be spread out in broad formation right across the plain. Their details became visible through binoculars and Farren's first question was answered. These were attackers, the first wave of them.

Tanks. Enormous tanks. Great rolling masses of steel, mobile forts built to cross mountain, plain and jungle, fighting as they came. Field-guns protruded from the streamlined barbettes crowning them, belching fire. Between them scuttled myriads of smaller tanks, of about thirty tons weight, blazing away with lighter artillery and machineguns. Behind this fleet of desert battle-ships came huge armored cars carrying still heavier guns, coming more slowly and firing with precision. Right at the back was mobile artillery, great howitzers mounted on

tractors. These stopped at last, settled themselves and fired ranging salvos which developed rapidly into a counterbarrage. The tanks rolled inexorably on to the foot of the mountains amid a deluge of shellfire. The earth quaked under the bombardment. Gundry estimated that the defenders had guns of twelve-inch calibre at least, far back behind the mountains, firing over them, getting ranges by means unknown.

A terrible, majestic sight, that attack; but equally terrible was the defense. For the first time the expeditionaries saw that the guns had come down the mountainside and were visible. Machineguns crouched behind rocks, sputtering flame; long, slim anti-tank guns nosed out from cover and poured a withering fire into the lighter tanks, joined by light mortars that barked in chorus further up. Higher still, but just visible, were the six-inch howitzers, firing rapidly into the further lines of heavy tanks. Despite the volcanic destruction they faced, the huge machines rolled on and up.

Up and over they went, crushing the first line of machineguns and anti-tank rifles in their path. These light pieces had scarcely made dents in them. Even six-inch shells seemed to make little impression. It was only frequent and direct hits from the colossal twelve-inch pieces back in the mountains that offered serious resistance. This fire grew heavier, more frequent and more accurate. The earth shuddered and shook. Scarcely a mile from the watching men a tank blew up in a column of flame, struck directly by a twelve-inch salvo, and in the cave rocks loosened and fell from the roof. It was time for retreat. The cave might

be blocked by falling rock and the men entombed, but the risk was better than the certainty of destruction in that rising inferno, for tanks were advancing upon the pass and shellfire grew perilously near. Gundry shouted for the retreat.

**T**HE cave proved to be a long tunnel and a draft of air indicated that it was open at the other end, providing a safe exit in case the first end became blocked. The men went in deep, guided by their powerful torches, and far within, when the noise of battle was deadened, they accepted the inevitable and struck camp again. They were there all day and the following night. They knew nothing of how the battle progressed. Saw nothing of the initial success of the giant tanks as they ploughed their way to the top of the mountains; nothing of the heavy losses the tanks sustained, or of their final defeat and annihilation when the huge artillery pieces finally got the exact range and scored one direct hit after another, rending and smashing the great machines like heavy boots trampling on a child's toys; nothing of the fast and furious counter-attack, when wave after wave of heavy tanks, smaller than the first monsters but still huge, poured out of the mountain passes and rolled down to the armored cars and mobile artillery on the plain like a flood; or of the final destruction of an enemy that never retreated but continued to fight blindly and insanely until it was smashed out of action for ever. The men only sat and talked, wondering—wondering—

Until at last a silence settled over the world, a silence that might have meant the end of the world. Deep

in the cave the expeditionaries felt that the tortured earth was at the end of its agony, that the machines that made it their battleground no longer ran riot over its face, and that it was now safe for men, once Lords of Creation, to come into the open again.

The wrack of battle was spread away all over mountain and desert as far as the eye could see. Here lay overturned guns; there, wrecked tanks and armored cars; great slabs of steel plate and broken gun-barrels, or just mere masses of wrecked, mangled, tortured iron. The men picked their way through the fantastic maze, heading briskly westward by Pascoe's compass. But though their steps were firm their hearts were heavy and their minds clouded, preyed with the unspoken thought of Kellogg: that they were mere helpless insects in a jungle of metal carnivora. Even Janning failed to recapture his normal truculent defiance. His helpless arm and shoulder, which was not improved by lack of proper attention, sapped the splendid strength of his wire-and-whipcord body and lowered the resistance of his sturdy mind. Worse than anything was the overwhelming evidence that seemed to prove that Kellogg, with all his morbidity, was right. Worst of all was that horrible, that unbelievable element that made these impossible machines still more impossible—the dark, sticky liquid that flowed sluggishly from the machines and stained the sands of the desert a rusty reddish-brown.

"In my worst vision of the fall of Man," murmured Kellogg to himself, "I never imagined that machines would shed blood."

Gundry had seen service in the

French Foreign Legion and knew what forced marching meant. He got the expedition going at a hard, steady pace with five minutes' breathing space at the end of every hour. Of the five men he was the only one who had kept in mind the ordeal in front of them, the journey of nearly two hundred miles across desert land to the time-chamber.

Being a man who took facts as they came he just shrugged his shoulders and thought no more of it. But he was wise enough to keep the knowledge to himself; no sense in giving the others something more to worry over—they would come to that soon enough.

AT the end of six hours marching they stopped for a meal. They were still in reasonably good shape, and had been lucky enough to come across a clump of trees and scrub in which was a good fresh-water spring. With good stocks of water and feeling thoroughly refreshed, they resumed the march. By now they were drawing away from the enormous battle area, where devastation seemed to spread away as far as the range of super-heavy artillery permitted. It did not change, that silent landscape of smashed and twisted metal. An iron army had ridden out of nowhere, and in the desert had been annihilated. It seemed to have been completely self-contained and self-supporting, for there were no signs of supply trains or any of the regular support of a human army. But obviously these things had come from somewhere, as had the air fleet. Another city, no doubt, further away to the west and beyond the location of the time chamber; and these two cities were

at war. Machines at war! What could their motive be—how could they possibly have a motive? That question sank back dully into the subconscious minds of the expeditionaries as they put their backs into the task of covering the longest possible distance in the shortest possible time.

Some twenty-odd miles from the mountains the damage was less heavy and less widespread. Direct hits had been much fewer, and though all machines were immobilized, still many seemed to be undamaged. Some guns remained upright, as if ready for firing. In their path the expeditionaries came across a light tank, one of the thirty-tonners, partly overturned but leaning against a rock that supported it. There was a gash in its upper turret, over which was a mess of dried and hardened blood, but otherwise it seemed undamaged. Gundry had an idea and climbed up the back of it to get in.

Twenty minutes of examination told him what he wanted to know. The tank was, of course, a kind of super-robot and was now out of action as far as driving itself went. The blood had gushed from some case below the turret, but that was too smashed to show anything; the machine, if intelligent, had been "killed," but the mechanism was still there and it was practically the same as that of a twenty-first century tank. Gundry called to the others who were examining the outside, and announced cheerfully that from now on they could drive to the time chamber in comparative comfort. Warily, but in better spirits, they piled in.

There was room enough inside the

machine and it travelled smoothly, but the noise of it and the abominable mingled odors of oil and blood took away all pleasure from the ride. When gear was stowed Farren tried to clear away the mess of blood with the sleeve torn from his shirt and a canteen of water, and so made things a little more comfortable. Janning, glad to rid his mind of Kellogg's somber theorizing, dragged himself around to examine the machine's armament. It carried a three-inch gun amidships, still in firing order, a ten-pounder in the upper turret which was damaged and two heavy machineguns, one out of order. It had entered the battle without firing a shot and the magazine was full. Janning felt better after that.

With Gundry's skilled piloting they made seventy miles an hour across the open desert. Scrub and trees thickened, and by low ranges of hills were occasional small woods. The tank ploughed through one of these woods in its path, rolling down stout trunks like twigs, over hills taking steep gradients without slowing. From this range a road curved out to the west and Gundry made for it, speeding as he went. At one hundred and twelve miles per hour the tank reached maximum speed. Soon they reached a main-road crossing, where other cars joined them and sped toward the buildings of a village or small town which showed themselves in the distance.

IT was a small town, and part of it was on fire. As the tank rolled through the outer suburbs the noise of gunfire and crash of falling buildings was heard. The streets were thronged with racing, roaring motorcycles, all carrying guns, heading for

the further side where the trouble seemed to be. The tank was not noticed at all, save for machines that carefully scuttled out of its way, and it seemed to be taken for granted. Nothing loath, Gundry followed the stream and the others limbered up their weapons. Janning and Farren went in the fore to stand by the three-incher.

The town was a derelict place with many buildings fallen as if from age and neglect, and the road was in a bad state of disrepair. Potholes were plentiful, not large enough to incommode the huge war-machine but quite an obstacle for the motorcycles, which bumped and pitched over the roads and frequently overturned, and overset others in their wake. The tank bored on flattening these heaps of fuming wreckage under its tractors, shoving aside any luckless machines not spry enough to get out of the way. Ready for still more action if need be, the expeditionaries stood ready at posts within. In the centre of the town the road passed through a broad square, divided by gardens, and on the further side of this houses were aflame. The square was almost blocked with stationary motorcycles and small tractors with mounted machineguns that poured fire into the roads and houses before them, and from these places, from invisible sources, a small but powerful volume of fire was returned.

"Who in hell is fighting back from cover?" demanded Janning, with something of his old fierceness. "The machines have been fighting in the open—damnation, do you think—?"

He caught Farren's eye. For an each other, amazed, questioning, instant they gazed breathlessly at

credulous, each with the same thought.

"It's impossible!" Farren cried.

"I'm damned if it is!" shouted Janning, "Come on, Gundry, into 'em!"

The tank smashed its way across the square under the soldier's firm, skilled hand, straight for a road strewn with debris from blazing buildings on either side that were about to collapse. Immediately the defenders concentrated their light but bitter fire on the new attacker, but above the noise of gunfire Janning's straining ears caught the unmistakable sound he listened for, the shouts and yells of despairing and defiant men.

"Don't shoot, blast you!" roared Janning unreasonably, "We're friends, allies, we're fighting with you!"

Then they were in the inferno, steeljacketed bullets bouncing like hail from the sides of the tank. Behind it sounded the roar of high explosives and the collapse of undermined buildings. The road now was blocked and impassable to either side. Well past the blazing line the expeditionaries found bullets striking the machine in the rear. Gundry swerved the tank round till it faced the attacking machines.

"Give 'em a demonstration" Janning shouted, and with swift and rapid assistance from the others the three-incher was loaded and fired at point-blank range into the thronged square. Shell after shell they poured at the attackers, a curse with each one, until the gun-barrel was almost redhot, the magazine empty and the square a mass of flaming wreckage.

Gunfire ceased. The war-machines were still and silent, still with vic-

tory or roaring to destruction. Janning did not wait but swung open a door in the side of the tank and leapt into the street.

"Come on out, you sons of a gun!" he roared, waving his uninjured right arm excitedly. "Here's the relief force. Where the hell are you?"

They came. Doors flew open and out they came, armed and defiant but surprised and hopeful at the appearance of an unexpected ally. About a dozen of them. Men.

## CHAPTER VII

THEY were a sturdy lot, rough, hairy, hardbitten young fellows dressed in skins cut with rude skill into fairly good clothes. They carried good rifles which they held at the ready, though more from habit than from any suspicion of the expeditionaries. Janning flung down his revolver and ran to the foremost of them with extended hand. After one first look of amazement the man threw down his gun likewise and seized the proffered hand in both his, shook it vigorously.

"Done it at last!" he shouted, "Beaten the damn things an' got hold of one! Who are you, fella? What's your clan?"

Janning never had time to answer those questions. Came a sound of fast and noisy machines and a squad of motorcycles rounded a corner, that burst into gunfire on the instant. Half the little group of men was mown down before they could shoot back, before the one-handed Janning could get out his other gun, cursing as he fumbled. He heard late yells of warning, the roar of guns on the tank. His gun was out. A charging machine was almost upon him, shooting wildly. A chance bullet smashed

his gun-hand, then a huge body swept him aside and from the corner of his eye he saw for an instant the man whose hand he had shaken, charging at the machine with a gun raised like a club. Something like a redhot iron seared his scalp and then he knew nothing more.

He came to slowly, his mind a confused blur and his body a mass of pain. There was noise around him, things shaking, and the sound of voices. Brandy went down his throat, scalding. He choked, gritted his teeth and tried to sit up, supported by a friendly arm, to find himself looking into the fine, open features of the man who had saved his life. He grinned faintly through a gasp of pain.

"Mighty good work, fella," he gritted. "I'll do ugh—as much for you, some time," he coughed heavily, shaking his whole frame, "and where the—hell—are we now?"

"Nearly back at the time chamber," he heard Kellogg's soothing voice. "Don't excite yourself, Janning. You're in no fit state for that."

"Hell!" He struggled to rise but Kellogg's firm hand gently held him back. He relaxed, panting, looked up at the man of the thirty-first century. "What's your name, brother?"

"Smith. Just plain Jim Smith. The fellers here told me you are the time travellers we read about in the old histories. No wonder you could beat these damned things. In your time the machines had no brains an' you kept 'em in their proper place. Things have changed since them—and how they have!"

"So we've seen. How did it happen? What is all this damned place, anyway?"

(Continued on Page 110)

# The Brain Conscription

By ZAN SAVAGE

The Jovians intended conscripting the brains of a million men and something had to be done.

*Illustration by Bok*

The draft-eligible men of Earth look to the luck of the draw tomorrow.

It's Draft Lottery Day—the day of the biggest and most serious game of chance in the planet's history.

From a twenty-gallon moonfish bowl will be drawn little black capsules, each containing a number that will determine who will be called in the conscription of 1,000,000 brains.

Starting promptly at noon, the capsules will be drawn—

**J**ACK HOWARD crushed the teleneews dispatch in his hand and hurled it across the room. "The best minds of the planet!" he said between his teeth. "To be harnessed in a calculating machine!"

"They'll call 'em fast too this time," said the city editor. "They'll start cutting tomorrow and there's nothing anybody can do about it."

Howard shook his head. "The machine they already got thinks up protection faster'n we can think up weapons. They'll take these brains as easy as they took a hundred last year."

"And we'll have a million corpses to cremate tomorrow."

"A human sacrifice to the science of Jupiter," Howard said. His fists tightened. "The year 2442 won't be forgotten . . ."

A copy-boy stuck his head in the door. "Fellow out here to see you, Jack."

Howard unraveled his long legs and got up. "I'll check on the panic suicides in Manhattan and report back later, Ed." He strode out of the office to find a small white-haired man standing in the waiting room.

"Mr. Howard?" The old fellow squinted up at him over his thick spectacles. "I'm Professor Gilbert of the Academy of Science."

Howard shook his hand with mild surprise. What did the guy want with him?

"You were an army pilot during the invasion weren't you, Mr. Howard?"

"Yes sir," Howard said.

Then the old man glanced about the room cautiously. He leaned forward. "Would you pilot a plane for me?" he whispered. "For me and



### Earth—against the Jovians?"

Howard jumped. His eyes shot to the information desk but the girl at the switchboard was busy talking to the copy-boy. Otherwise, the room was deserted. He looked back to the professor. "Are you crazy, man? Suppose somebody'd heard you say that!"

"We have little time—we must take chances," the old fellow said. "Will you fly for me?"

Howard stared at him incredulously. "Me—pilot a plane? They destroyed them all. Where'll you find one?"

The professor's eyes narrowed. "We have planes," he said, softly. "Twenty-five of them—hidden in the Adirondacks. We have new disintegrator bombs I invented and twenty-four ex-army pilots like yourself. They suggested you. Will you join us?"

Howard was too amazed to speak.

"Tomorrow the Jovians remove the brains of a million men," the professor continued. "They plan a million-brain thought machine to govern the solar system—like the smaller hundred-brain machine controls the planet. Once they construct that larger machine our plight will be hopeless for all eternity. But if we attacked before then . . ."

"There's been other schemes like yours," Howard said skeptically. "They've all failed."

"They didn't have planes—and disintegrator bombs," the professor said. "And isn't it worth a try? With a million lives at stake—and the future of Earth?"

As Howard stared at him in bewilderment, the old man clutched his arm. "Come with me!" he said. "Our plans will convince you."

Howard followed him dazedly to the elevator.

WHEN they left the building for the street, Howard noticed the lack of noise. Trucks and electro-cars still purred by in the morning sunlight and strato-planes hummed overhead. But New York's passing crowds were strangely silent. They moved in the usual stream but with tight lips. When people spoke it was in nervous whispers in the presence of the dead . . .

"The hand of death hovers over the city," the professor said. "Each capsule in that moonfish bowl is a signal for the hand to fall."

Howard followed him, still dubious about his scheme. Too many had already died trying to verthrow the Jovian rule. During the invasion Earth hadn't had a chance against their mechanical might. With a portable thought machine directing them with cold infallible precision, the Jovians had swept over the unprepared world in an irresistible flood. A world of individuals, Earth had quickly fallen before the concentrated power of a single mind with an army of hands.

The professor had twenty-five bombers? Howard smiled ruefully. What were bombers against these invulnerable creatures! Each Jovian was a combination airplane and tank. He noticed the Jovian policeman on the corner—typical. Wierd in the eight-foot shell that protected him from Earth's gravity and atmosphere, the Jovian was directing traffic like a robot. A metal monster!

Its steel shell looked like one of those containers drug stores keep gas for carbonated water in—with a glass viewplate, a televisor-eye that sent every scene to the thought machine, mechanical arms and legs and

a heat-gun fixed to the top. Inside the shell was a radio transmitter—and a hairy green beast that was the Jovian. He could out-fly a plane or out-run a car. And the aerial on his back threw blue static sparks as it kept in constant touch with the thought machine that could solve any problem. . . .

The professor halted beside a long electro-car parked at the curb. "Get in," he said. "We can talk on the way."

Howard climbed in with more curiosity than enthusiasm and the little man jumped in beside him, whirred the car out into the river of traffic and headed uptown.

"Now what's this scheme of yours?" Howard said. "It sounds crazy but if it's got the slightest chance, I'm for it — my number'll probably be called anyway and I won't have much chance hiding."

The professor set the car on the lane-beam and turned to him slowly. "We have an excellent chance," he said with more excitement than his voice could restrain. "One of my bombs can turn a battleship into powder. And we have enough planes to drop hundreds of them."

"Okay," Howard said, still unconvinced. "But how you going about it? There's a Jovian on every corner on Earth. You can't bomb all of 'em very quick and they're killing 1,000,000 men tomorrow afternoon."

The professor smiled. "I'll begin at the beginning," he said. "Briefly, my daughter and I spent the past year watching Jovian activities while we worked on my disintegrator principle and smuggled material to build the planes."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes, Carmine Gilbert. She was

the only one I could trust at first. Anyway, we collected all the information we could get about the thought machine they installed on Mt. Marcy last year. This machine is literally a supreme intelligence. It holds all the thought necessary for governing Earth. It directs every activity — from street cleaner to Jupiter's Earth Governor. It can answer any problem whether its about cleaning a sewer or conquering Mars."

"Couldn't it just as easily figure out a protection against your bombs," Howard asked.

"Yes," the professor said. "It probably could. But that's the point. It won't know about them till its too late. We're going to bomb the thought machine itself. . . ."

Howard whirled on him in disbelief. "Are you mad!" he said. "There are a thousand Jovians guarding that machine—on the ground and in the air. You can't get within ten miles of the place!"

The professor smiled once more. "I told you we must take chances," he said quietly. "But this chance isn't so far-fetched—with bombs landing near the machine before we're in sight. It'll lure the guards off while we sneak up."

Howard threw up his hands in disgust. "Bombs'll land before we get there! That's pure genius. Do you mind telling me who'll drop 'em?"

"My daughter," the old man said simply. "She leaves for the moon this afternoon on a forged passport. Her bag is already at the station—full of bombs. It took us months to calculate the path of the Earth-Moon spaceliner in relation to its gravity-pull position over Mt. Marcy and the thought machine. We found however that an object dropped from the spaceliner at exactly 2:58 would hit

somewhere near Mt. Marcy." He laughed.

"My disintegrator bombs are small," he said. "Carmine will carry five—and drop them at 2:53. From that distance in space it will take them almost an hour to reach Earth—at 3:37. Of course we couldn't accurately bomb the machine from that distance. Our planes will attack shortly after they hit . . ."

As Howard gazed at him in astonishment, the little professor pulled out of the lane-beam and stopped the car before an expensive apartment house.

"Come," he said, getting out. "Before we go to the mountains we'll have lunch with Carmine. She leaves shortly."

**A**FTER an excellent lunch, Howard found his concentration varying between the daughter's beauty and her father's words.

"The thought machine," Professor Gilbert was saying, "is an ingenious combination of delicate surgery and advanced physics. It is a hundred brains fused together as one—after each has been synthetically taught separate subjects till it becomes expert. The Jovians depend upon the machine's infallible wisdom in everything they do."

Howard lost his words as the girl came over and refilled his glass.

"Doesn't Papa just bore you to death?" she said. "For three years—ever since the invasion -- all I've heard is thought machines and disintegrators. When this's all over I think I'll move into a night club and stay there."

"All I've heard," Howard grinned, "is death-draft and umpteen tons of

gray matter. I'll move in with you." Carmine Gilbert sure was a work of art, he decided again. Autumn-haired, winter-eyed but laughing, she sparkled in the room like a movie star. Her flashing beauty and table-for-two charm banished all remembrance of the horror on every corner outside.

"The new thought machine," continued the professor, "will require fifteen hundred tons of brain cells. One brain weighs about three pounds—they will need a hundred men. And I understand this draft is similar to an ancient war-draft used in the twentieth century. Our ancestors had a chance to die on the field of battle. But the youth of today can only sit and wait for death—and in dying give their very minds to the continued subjugation of their people."

"Do the brains in the machine think as separate personalities at all?" Howard came back to the conversation."

"No," said the professor. "They lose all individuality. They become only units dependent upon the whole like the parts of an adding machine. And that is why—"

He stopped, suddenly jumped up knocking his glass to the floor. Howard rose slowly. Carmine looked at them with startled eyes as the sound of clanking metal came from the hall outside.

"Jovians!" the professor whispered. "They're coming this way!"

"What do they want?"

"I don't know—maybe they've discovered our plan—"

Something heavy banged on the door. "Open, Earthman Gilbert, or we break it down!" It was the scratchy voice of a Jovian speaking tube.

"They must suspect something,"

Professor Gilbert whispered. "And suspicion means death. Quick! Out the back way—the emergency exit!"

As he spoke the door burst open with a crash and three Jovians stepped into the room.

"Run!"

Professor Gilbert shoved Howard and the girl ahead of him into the next room. Carmine jumped to a small hidden door. The next instant a stream of violent heat spurted from the Jovians' head-guns. Glancing over his shoulder, Howard saw it. Purple flames streaked into the professor's back and the old man slumped forward without a sound. A jagged sizzling hole was burned through his chest. The floor under him caught fire.

For one eternal second Howard saw the old man lying there with flesh-smoke curling from his back, fire licking at his clothes. He saw the Jovians standing in the door, metal monsters with steel arms dangling, green eyes ablaze in the shadows of glass viewplates. He saw the little heat-guns on their shell tops rise toward him like striking cobras.

Then he whirled. He saw the white-faced girl standing at the open trap door. Violet fire hissed over his shoulder, blasted into the wall two inches from his head as he pushed Carmine bodily through the door.

He saw stairs under his feet, circling downward into darkness. With his arm about Carmine's waist he bounded down the stairs in blind flight. He heard heavy feet banging after him, saw reflections of fire on the dim walls.

Then he crashed into something. It was another door. It flew open and he found himself in a deserted alley behind the apartment house.

"They're coming this way!" he gasped to the girl. "We got to get away from here!"

Dazed, grief-stricken, Carmine stared at him blankly as metal boots thundered down the stairs. Then her eyes narrowed. "Take this!" She jerked a small notebook from her pocket, pushed it into his hand. "It'll show you what to do. You've got to lead them now." The Jovians sounded like tractors coming down the stairs.

"Carry on!" Carmine cried. "I'll be on the spaceliner . . ."

She ran toward the traffic-choked street as Howard stared after her. Then he fled in the opposite direction, turned a corner as the Jovians clattered down into the alley.

Peeping back he saw the Jovians racing toward the street. The girl wasn't in sight.

Then a crowd gathered quickly and as Howard watched firemen pour into the burning building, his mind whirled. Two hours ago he'd been talking to his boss about the most terrible news-story in history. Now he was watching flames consume the body of a man who died trying to prevent that story from becoming tomorrow's news.

He glanced down at the notebook the girl had given him. Carmine was leaving for the moon with a suitcase full of bombs. Twenty-four pilots were meeting in the Adirondacks where airplanes were hidden. And this notebook in his hand—it was the key to the whole scheme.

"You've got to lead them now," Carmine had said. . . .

Howard moved out of the crowd and left the smoke-filled street. He rented a car and headed for the mountains.

**THE** green hills of Ticonderoga had seen other fights for freedom. Ethan Allen had helped a revolution there. Seven hundred years later Jack Howard started another.

Glancing at his watch, he called the men together near the little silver strato-planes on the sunlit field. Dressed in civilian clothes as they had come from their various jobs, the twenty-four pilots gathered around him in impatient silence.

Howard spoke quietly. "We take off in five minutes," he said. "You know what the odds are. If Carmine Gilbert succeeds in dropping her bombs from the spaceliner, we have a chance—if the bombs hit anywhere near the thought machine and distract the guard so we can sneak up. And even if we fail it's a better death than having our numbers called tomorrow.

"Each of you, like myself," he said, "fought against the Jovians during the invasion. We lost that fight. We have another chance at them now—with our lives and our world at stake for the last time. Good luck to each of you. Let's go."

Every man shook his hand or slapped him on the back as they started toward the ships. Howard found his throat strangely choked up. But there'd been no more to say. They'd planned it all out two hours ago when he got there. He climbed in his plane.

Sitting in the one-man cabin, he saw a fox run across the field in front of the plane. The place was so deep in the thick mountain woods the animals were almost tame. And hidden from Jovian eyes, Professor Gilbert had worked here constantly since the invasion—dug underground hangars for the planes, dug a completely

equipped place for himself and his daughter to live while they worked and waited.

And strangely, the old man had been the first to die in his scheme. But his plans still lived! Howard felt the little notebook in his coat pocket. It held careful notes and directions about everything. It had led him to the hidden valley in the Adirondacks where the planes and men were waiting, it had set his watch to the split-second timing essential to the attack.

Now the professor's daughter was somewhere above these sun-streaming clouds doing her part. He glanced at his watch. She should have dropped the bombs forty minutes ago. They should be hitting Mt. Marcy in thirty seconds!

He yanked back the starting lever. As his twin motors coughed into life, the other planes roared behind him. He raced the ship across the short field, hummed up into the bright sky over the wooded hills. Two dozen silver-winged bullets followed him. The mountains below dwindled to autumn-hued mounds.

The squadron climbed to seven miles and leveled off. Only the guard over Mt. Marcy could detect them at that altitude above the ocean of clouds. With his oxygen tubes hissing, Howard checked the disintegrator guns. As he pressed the trigger button, a stream of white swirled around the props. From each shaft spurted a blast of power dissolving the very air into its component elements. Then with his hands tense on the wheel he watched the auto-chart on the instrument panel.

Slowly, with the sound of the motors a lazy drone in the cabin and the other ships gliding like skyfish beside him, the position-pointer on

the chart reached the X-spot over Mt. Marcy.

He circled slowly, eyes squinting into the sunlight, his body cold with excitement. There wasn't a guard in sight at this altitude! But what if Carmine hadn't been able to drop the bombs? And from that height out in space—what if they landed a thousand miles away? His clothes were wet with sweat, his hands clammy on the wheel. What if they dived and found the Jovians on guard just below the clouds? . . .

His watch screamed 3:50. He spun the wheel, tipped over and the ship dropped like a stone. The others would follow in dive-bomber fashion.

For a long moment his viewpoint was a stream of flying mist. Then he burst through the clouds, saw a forest-covered peak rising to meet him—Mt. Marcy. He saw plumes of white smoke drifting skyward from a valley about ten miles west of the mountain. He screamed his joy above the blast of wind in his wings.

"The bombs! She did it!" And they had lured off the guard. The air below was empty. He saw the guard curiously circling the valley ten miles away.

Standing on its nose, the plane shrieked down and Howard saw the glistening dome of the thought machine on the peak. He grabbed the bomb release. The dome came up swiftly—4,000—3,000 feet below. It was a huge circle of metal, shaped like an observatory. And a hundred brains lay inside the thing, constantly thinking. Around the dome, Howard saw other buildings with Jovians flying out like hornets as he hurtled upon them. Then the dome filled his sights. He pulled the bomb release and jerked the wheel to his chest.

A dozen egg-shaped bombs drop-

ped toward the dome as the plane zoomed away. Blood roared in his ears as he came out of the dive. But the gyro held and he didn't lose consciousness. He circled around at 500 feet to watch the fireworks. Looking down, he saw the flashing specks of metal falling swiftly. Another plane streaked over the dome and released its load. Then another came, and another. Howard lost count. He saw Jovians coming up from the mountain with the speed of the falling bombs. Rocket jets latticed the sky with smoke. Howard banked over. He saw the bombs hit! They were disintegrators—the dome would dissolve! It was a direct hit!

Then his eyes bulged! He saw the bombs hit—something. But nothing happened! Only a burst of dissolved air over the dome!

He shook his head like he'd been struck. He couldn't believe what he saw. The bombs didn't hit the dome—they exploded in thin air several yards above it—one after another, as if striking an invisible shield. Something was protecting the dome. Banking low, he felt the plane shudder, heard the concussion as the bombs burst. He saw several miss the dome, tear ragged holes in the ground beside it. The field around the dome boiled. But each bomb that went true to its mark burst harmlessly in the air. . . .

God! what was the matter! What was protecting the machine! An icy stab of fear hit Howard in the belly. They'd failed—

But there was no time to think. The air was filled with darting Jovians. The purple streams of their heat-guns streaked the sky. . . .

**T**HE fight was hopeless from the start. The unharmed thought ma-

chine below directed every manoeuvre the Jovians made. In less than five minutes eighteen planes were shot down and the rest were fleeing in all directions—with nowhere to go.

Howard found himself whizzing toward the sunset with six Jovians on his tail. As he whipped into a dive to shake them off, he caught a glimpse of six of his comrades plunging earthward near him like dropped torches.

Through the rear-view mirror, he saw the Jovians falling after him in perfect formation. Metal arms and legs trailing in the wind, they looked like giant insects. And their stings could out-leap a bullet. He saw lines of violet fire waver around his wings.

His heart jumping to panic, he jabbed the wheel forward and rolled out from under them. But the streaks of fire followed him relentlessly. He couldn't use his guns. They out-maneuvred him at every trick.

Then a blast of purple found his rudder. Another bit into his left wing.

Stifling in sudden wind-furious heat, Howard fought the slack controls as a sheet of flame crawled toward the cabin window and the ground loomed up under his windshield. He saw a small village whirling close beneath him. God! He was going to crash—!

The plane was a burning coffin. He didn't have a chute but he dropped the dead wheel, started for the door to jump. The cabin walls blistered in the heat. He pushed open the door and red whips lashed into his face. Wind and fire.

With his arm across his face, he jumped through the flaming door as the plane piled into the village street and exploded with an ear-splitting

concussion—

—and he came to with three frightened faces staring down at him.

He found he was lying on the floor in a dim-lit room. It was cold and damp, a cellar? He sat up, holding his pain-throbbing head. "What happened?" he asked. The faces were a man and two small boys.

"We drug yuh out'n th' road afore th' Jovies found yuh," said the man. He was lanky, wore overalls. The boys were skinny and looked like him.

Howard struggled to his feet. "How long've I been here?"

"Nigh on two hours . . ."

"My God!" He glanced down at himself, found his clothes blackened and burned, his arms caked with dried blood. He'd escaped the crash by a miracle.

"Yuh better not go out," the man said. "They been broadcastin' ever since 'bout a reward fer you'n that gal who dropped th' bombs frum th' moon-plane. It wuz a smart trick, buddy, but th' thought machine figured it out. Figured out them new bombs o' yourn too—afore you could do any damage. That there machine jest can't be licked . . ."

Howard stared at him, then weakly covered his face with his hands. The realization of what had happened swept through him like a chill. The thought machine must have analyzed the first bomb that fell. Almost instantly it had thought up a defense, some sort of invisible repulsor. Later it must have calculated those first ones couldn't have been dropped by the planes and traced the matter to Carmine on the spaceliner. Their plan had failed completely. . . .

"You'n th' gal were th' only ones thet got away," the fellow added.

Howard stumbled over to a chair. Then, "Can you lend me some clothes?" he asked finally. The man and the boys went out, returned with a lengthy pair of overalls and a shirt. Changing, Howard asked the way to Ticonderoga.

At the door the man pointed out the right road. "Good luck," he said. "I shore like what you tried to do anyway."

The conquered people of Earth were solidly behind any plot against the Jovians. But they were helpless—and they would remain so now, Howard thought with a dismal heart. He shook the man's hand.

"Thanks for everything you did," he said and started down the dark road.

**AFTER** stealing three electro-cars and twice eluding squads of Jovians, he finally reached the hidden place in the Adirondacks after fifteen soul-breaking hours. It was the day of the death draft.

Oddly, as he stumbled down the woods-dim path, he thought of his boss at the newspaper office. It was about ten o'clock—Ed was probably reading the morning edition and wondering what'd happened to him. The morning edition would carry streamers about the nearing conscription. And about the repulsor shield with which the Jovians had stopped the latest revolt. . . .

"Jack!"

Howard walked slowly to the girl and collapsed in her arms.

The next thing he knew was a great sense of refreshment and he opened his eyes to discover white sheets, a neat bed-room and the girl sitting beside him.

He stared at Carmine a very long time. Then he said, "I thought you'd

be here. . . ."

"Where else could I go?"

"What happened to you?" Howard said.

"After dropping the bombs, I caught the next plane back from the moon," she said. "When I got back, I found out what had happened and started here to see if—if anybody had survived. I got away just before the thought machine started checking who'd been on the spaceliner." Her eyes misted.

"What can we do, Jack?" she said quietly. "The planes're gone, and the pilots. There's nothing here. Not even a bomb. And they'll find us before long—"

Howard said, "We've got to think." He swung his feet to the floor, sat there staring at the faded blue of his overalls. Carmine walked to the door of the dugout. He got up and followed her, every atom of his mind focused upon the one problem: What to do?

But gazing out into the sunny field, a teeth-grinding ache slowly gnawed at his belly. There was **nothing** they could do! The Jovians were probably on their trail right now. They'd find them before the afternoon was over—and take the million brains for a **new** thought machine, clinch the steel hand of Jupiter for all time.

Carmine looked at him with hopeless eyes. Howard sat down on the steps. "Your father was a great man, Carmine," he said. "If he were here he'd find a way out of this."

"Papa will always be with us," the girl said. "He hated the Jovians so much. . . ."

Howard slammed his fist into his hand and got up. "If we only had more men!" He glanced around at the dugout. "Who dug this place—and

the hangars? If we could get enough men together—" He'd given up all hope of their escaping capture. That was inevitable. He was thinking of the million other lives that would soon be lost too. But he knew it was futile. The thought machine was invulnerable to attack by land or air.

"Papa dug the hangars himself," Carmine said. "It was easy with the disintegrator shovel."

"Disintegrator shovel?"

"Its an application of the bomb principle."

Howard sat down again resignedly. "We got one shovel to fight off a hundred thousand Jovians with." At the other end of the field, he saw a fox digging at a rabbit hole. The little brown animal was kicking up quite a dust. Howard watched him absently. Then his mouth slowly fell open. He yelled.

He jumped up as if a live wire had touched him. "How long'd it take your father to dig these holes?"

Carmine stared at him oddly. "Just a few minutes. Why?"

Howard yelled again, molten joy in his veins. "Where's that shovel!" he cried. "If we can't get at it from above we'll try from below!"

**I**T was noon when they finally reached the highway. They found a farmer who listened to them half-heartedly but agreed to smuggle them to Mt. Marcy in his milk truck.

When the farmer stopped on a deserted country road at the foot of the mountain, it was three o'clock and the radio in the truck babbled news about the million who had been called to die in the brain conscription.

"Every capital on Earth mourns the approaching death of thousands of its countrymen," said an announcer. "Directed by the almost superna-

tural organization of the thought machine, focal extraction boards have rounded up their quota of men and operations will begin within the hour. A hundred thousand brains will be taken by six o'clock and the grim work will continue throughout the night . . ."

"Every minute brings those men closer to death," Howard told Carmine, jumping out of the truck. He paused beside the farmer at the wheel. "You've got your job straight? You're to go to the radio station in town and watch the mountain from there. If you see us send up a smoke signal, start broadcasting for every Earthman to attack the nearest Jovian. The signal will mean the thought machine's destroyed.

"If you don't see any signal - well, you'll know we tried . . ."

The farmer pulled a couple of bottles of milk from a crate on the seat beside him. "You ain't had nothing t' eat since this morning," he said. "Take these along."

Food was the last thing in Howard's mind but he stuck one of the pint bottles in each side pocket of his overalls. "Thanks," he said vaguely. Then he struck off across the field with the disintegrator on his shoulder. Running at his side, Carmine carried a flashlight and two gas masks.

They crossed the field to a thick clump of bushes, disappeared into them as the milk truck turned back down the road. Howard unlimbered the shovel.

It looked more like a riveting hammer than a shovel. Working upon some intricate principle of atomic energy like the bombs, it dissolved anything it touched into basic elements.

Howard snapped on the motor, pointed the thing at the leaf-covered ground. The machine trembled in his hand with a faint humming noise. The leaves and soil before it suddenly boiled in thin white smoke. But it wasn't hot and it smelled like wet clay. Before his astonished eyes a ten foot hole appeared in the ground.

He wanted to drop the shovel and scream with new found hope, but with a tight smile he kept at the absurdly simple work. The bottle of milk in his right pocket kept clinking against the side of the disintegrator and he jerked it out, hurled it into the bushes. Then, in less than five minutes, he'd dug a tunnel large enough for them to stand in—twenty feet into the side of the mountain.

Bursting with quick glee, they put on their masks. Then following Carmine's directions as she constantly checked their angle of ascent, Howard blasted the long curved tunnel upward.

The deeper they went the colder it became. Like two human moles, they pushed into the unresisting earth, deeper and deeper. Carmine held the flashlight and with each swiftly vanishing yard, the colors of the rock strata changed, dull-hued gasses swirled up from the humming machine to rush past them in a small cyclone.

They went through pockets of coal but their masks protected them from the deadly fumes. Black carbon fell to dust at their feet. Streams of other pure metals fell aside as age-old ores were broken down. What if the loosened elements re-joined behind them to form some mighty explosion? They'd die like ants in a smashed hill. But with lives lost as each passing minute saw lines of

men filing to operating tables all over the world—

There was no time to think of the thousand dangers in the dank earth about them. There was no time to shout as each melting foot brought them nearer to the thought machine and its destruction. Sweat dripping from his face under the mask, Howard moved steadily behind the disintegrator. Spraying it before him, whirling it overhead to make standing room, he advanced slowly, one pulse-tingling step after another into the mountain. Like a woman with Halloween head, Carmine peered through her goggles checking their course with hastily scribbled geometry. She gestured directions keeping the tunnel on a rough but true line to the top of Mt. Marcy.

In thirty minutes they were two hundred feet from the top. They were digging their way faster than they could have climbed up outside.

"We'll be there in a few minutes!" Howard gasped to himself, blinking the sweat from his eyes. They'd blast their way straight to the brain vat and stop its work forever. . . .

He pushed on with the shovel, a grim smile on his lips. Earth melted before him, bubbling and disappearing like dust under a vacuum cleaner. Pure iron, glistening in the beam of the flashlight, crumbled out of the way as its oxygen hissed out and dropped the divorced metal like sand to the floor of the tunnel.

"We're about fifteen feet under the dome—" Carmine signaled on her fingers. She clapped her hands, eyes sparkling in her mask.

"We'll be at the thought machine in five minutes!" Howard breathed, striding forward and spraying the earthen wall viciously.

Then suddenly he bumped into the wall, almost breaking his goggles. Before him the jet black earth was streaked with yellow and silvery white. He jabbed the shovel into it. It didn't give though the motor hummed steadily. Something was wrong! It wouldn't dissolve the stuff! He glanced over his shoulder to Carmine.

The girl was turned to the darkness of the long shaft behind them. Following her gaze, Howard saw small lights blinking far down toward the entrance at the foot of the mountain.

Then he heard the faint clank of machinery. Jovians were coming up the tunnel after them. . . .

**"THEY'VE** found us! They're coming after us!" Howard breathed. Carmine clutched his arm.

He stared at the rapidly approaching lights. And they were trapped! Something was wrong with the disintegrator! They couldn't go any further. He glanced down at it, suddenly realized it was eating a hole in the floor of the tunnel at his feet. It was working again?

He jerked it back, attacked the striped wall again. But his hopes sank quickly as they had soared. The wall remained without a nick under the droning charge. Then he realized it must be the wall—not the shovel. The wall must be something unaffected by disintegration!

"But that's impossible!" he told himself. "Every compound's composed of elements—this thing can break any combination . . ." He heard the rattling of mechanical legs echoing up the tunnel as the Jovians came on. Glancing back, he saw the lights like ghost lamps on the earthen walls not a hundred yards away.

They were trapped—with only a few feet between them and their goal! They'd struck something too tough for the shovel. He cut it off resignedly.

Carmine scribbled something in her notebook, held the page in front of his mask under the flashlight. "What's wrong?" he read. "The shovel can break down anything—anything except pure elements."

Howard's heart sank as he saw what was the matter. The slab of wall between them and the floor of the dome must be pure minerals. There was nothing for the shovel to break down. But how could they be here in a pure state? It didn't exist in nature. Had the Jovians beaten them to the draw again? . . .

Then he realized something that chilled his every nerve. The bombs they'd dropped on the mountain yesterday—they'd hit all around the dome. They'd completely disintegrated all the ground within their range. A pitiless fate had turned their own weapon against them. . . .

Light flared in the tunnel, blinded them in a ghastly glare. Howard whirled the shovel toward the Jovians, his finger on the starter button. Carmine backed to the wall beside him. Squinting in the lights, they waited as the Jovians came up. Howard held the shovel ready, a meager weapon. Heat-guns could kill a man a mile away. The shovel was effective at only about ten yards. The Jovians had only to stand off and shoot them down like rabbits.

But they didn't. Howard's brow wrinkled. The Jovians slowed down when they were about fifty yards away and advanced slowly. Why did they not shoot? God! Were they playing with them, cruelly lengthen-

ing their torture before they rayed them down? The creatures clanked slowly forward on spindly steel legs. There were five of them. . . .

Then they weren't ten feet away, lights steady like boys about to gig two bull frogs. Howard suddenly noticed their heat guns were pointed backward! They weren't even aiming at them—!

Carmine stiffened as a metal arm reached toward her. Howard jumped from his trance, clicked on the disintegrator and poured it into them. The five Jovians fell like slashed corn stalks. They clattered to the floor with aeriels throwing futile blue sparks as the thought machine tried to contact their dead ears.

Howard pulled the hungry shovel off them, stared with questions exploding in his mind. Why hadn't they used the heat-guns? They could have killed them easily. Did they want them alive? Why?

Then Carmine's hand on his arm brought him back from his disjointed thoughts. Looking down the tunnel again, he saw hundreds of bobbing lights as an army of Jovians raced toward them from deep in the darkness.

He flattened against the wall beside the girl. Several hundred Jovians choked the tunnel, their lights like a fleet of electro-cars. He and Carmine were still trapped with the impregnable wall at their backs—while on the other side of the wall was a chance to regain the world for Earthmen. Just a few yards of some metal that was too damn pure!

But Earthmen had for too long died with their backs to walls while the Jovians merely asked a machine to solve their problems.

It was with that thought that

Howard suddenly leaped to the side of the nearest dead Jovian. Risking whatever lethal gasses might be in the tunnel, he jerked off his mask.

The thought machine could solve any problem—would it tell him how it itself could be destroyed? . . .

**HIS** first breath made him cough.

The air was strong with sulphur, heavy with coal dust. The dust tasted salty too. But the air was breathable—he bent over the Joivan as Carmine also took off her mask, stared at him with huge eyes.

He frantically unscrewed the Jovian's viewplate, pushed the dead hairy face aside and bent low over the microphone in the shell.

"How can I get through a fifteen foot wall of pure metals?" he called, visualizing the fantastic process his question started. Radio took his voice to the thought machine where the sentence was analyzed for its fundamental problem. Then it was transferred to the brain-group expert in that particular field. Finally its specific technicality was turned over to specialist cells and—the voice radioed back in less than two seconds:

"What are the metals?" A clearly modulated voice, mechanical, toneless.

Howard's heart sank as he heard Jovians coming up the tunnel like stampeding tanks. "I—I don't know what they are!"

"Hold a sample before the televisior so it may be spector-analyzed," directed the monotone.

Howard sprang to the wall, clawed at it with his finger nails. It was fairly soft and he leaped back with a handful, held it before the little televisior eye.

"Carbon, sulphur and sodium," the

thought machine reported. "The air about you contains dust of these plus nitrogen, oxygen and hydrogen."

"But how can I get through the wall?" Howard almost screamed. The Jovians' lights were flashing in his face. Then the answer nearly stunned him.

"Apply heat," said the voice. "You have all the essential elements of gun powder . . ."

Howard stood up slowly. He saw the mob of Jovians hurtling toward them with whirring gears. They were about fifty yards away, running fast with lights spraying the tunnel to daytime brightness. On top of each gleaming shell was a silent heat-gun—useless, and he knew why now. One spark would blow the tunnel to bits—themselves and their dear thought machine behind the wall!

He backed to the wall beside Carmine, laughing almost hysterically. The Jovians came to a clattering halt just beyond their dead comrades, just out of range of the disintegrator.

"They can't shoot!" Howard yelled to Carmine. "There's nothing they can do but try to take us bare handed. And I can cut 'em down fast as they come!"

The Jovians stood there looking at them, blue sparks glowing as they asked what to do.

"The thought machine can't help 'em now!" Howard laughed again. The thrill of victor sang in him. "Its already told us everything!"

"But what can we do?"

Carmine's question brought sanity back to him. He'd been so elated over their perfect defense, he hadn't thought of doing anything. But they couldn't stay here stalling them off forever—the thought machine would

figure out something, send in new weapons. Their plight hadn't changed. . . .

He watched the Jovians form lines along the tunnel walls with a wide lane between them. They were going to try something already. He saw one of them back down the narrow lane, then come plunging toward them like an express train. The creature was trying to smash them against the wall!

Howard shoved Carmine aside as the heavy mass of steel was upon them. He sprang out of the way. The Jovian crashed into the wall beside him, splintered to junk on the floor. The rest charged as he fell.

Howard swung up the disintegrator and a gaping hole churned in the mob. They were sliced down by the dozens.

They lost about thirty of their number in the attack. Then they drew back, formed a line along the walls again and another one backed up for a start.

"They're going to try it again!" Howard said. "God! we can't hold out long against these bombardments!" If a piece of flying metal hit him—!

"Have you got a match?" Carmine said, tense against the wall.

Watching the Jovian back to the far end of the line, Howard caught her intention. She'd blow up the tunnel with the Jovians and themselves—to destroy the thought machine. And he realized there was nothing else to do. He reached in his pocket for a match. And remembered he still wore the overalls—the pockets were empty. There was only the forgotten pint bottle of milk the farmer had given him. . . .

The Jovian reached the end of the

line, started back toward them gaining speed every second. With his hand on the bottle of milk, Howard watched him come as a little thought bubble formed deep in his mind and slowly rose to the surface of his consciousness. As the little idea burst upon him and the Jovian rushed on, he jerked out the milk bottle and smashed it against the wall. Glass tinkled on the floor and milk ran down the wall.

The Jovian skidded to a stop ten feet away. The others went rigid in the line. They stared at the wet splash of milk trickling down the colored wall, throwing sparks as they asked the thought machine what to do.

Then as if at a given signal each one turned and fled back down the tunnel in wild panic.

Carmine turned to Howard, her lips parted in astonishment. But he wasn't watching the mad flight of the Jovians. He had the disintegrator pointed at the floor of the tunnel. The shovel hummed at full speed and a hole widened as he spun it like he was digging dirt with a garden hose. With the shovel eating the earth at his feet, he glanced to the wall where the dripping milk was smoking at each silvery streak it touched. He looked back at the hole—it was about ten feet deep now. Big enough to hold two people.

"Jump in!" he cried to the girl as a loud hissing echoed in the tunnel above the pounding feet of the Jovians.

Carmine hesitated an instant. "Quick!" Howard yelled. She jumped into the hole feet first and he leaped in beside her, holding the humming disintegrator over their heads.

Then hell broke loose in the tunnel.

A swishing sound like a hurricane roared above them. A thunderous explosion numbed their ears as raging flame appeared above the hole and a blast of heat singed their hair and clothes. The mountain shook like an earthquake under the blast.

Then it was suddenly very quiet. Only the sound of tumbling stones broke the stillness. Daylight streamed into the tunnel through a dusty hole where the wall had been.

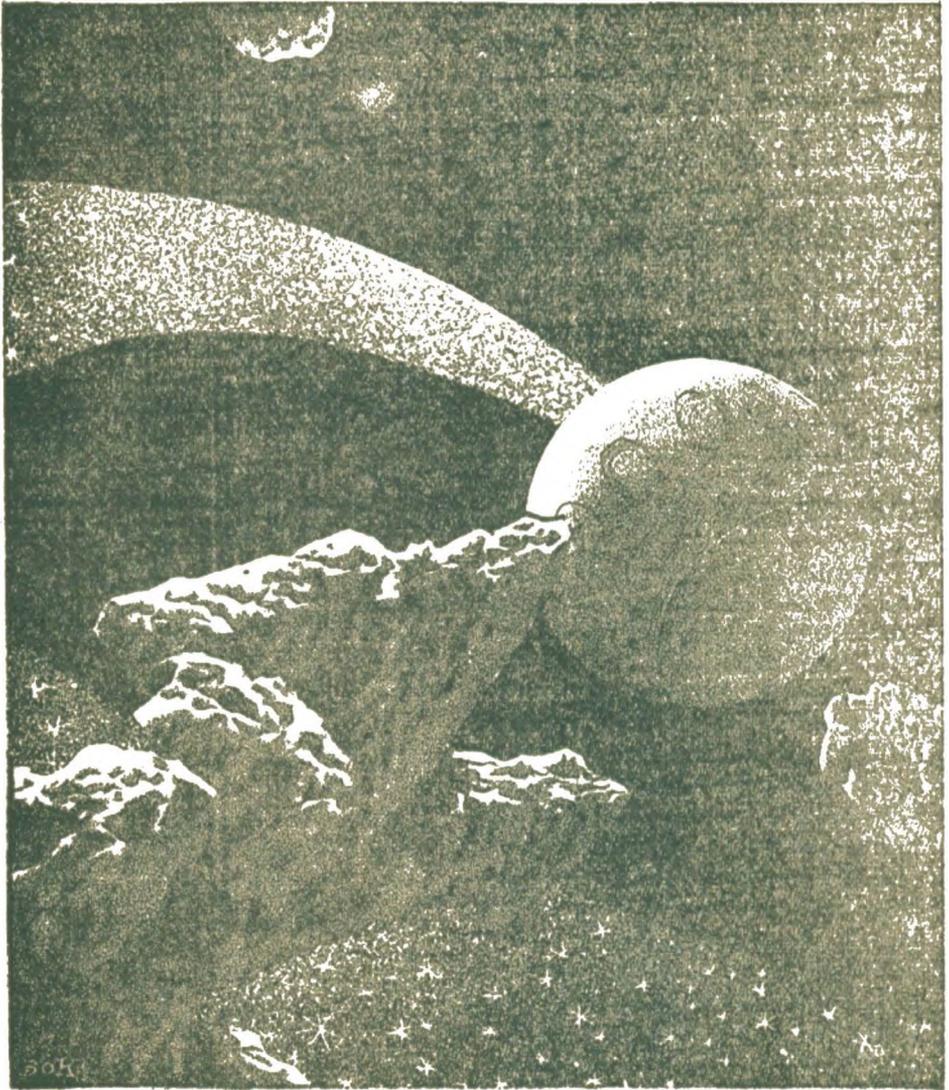
HOWARD cut off the disintegrator and rubbed his stinging eyes. He pulled himself out of the hole and helped Carmine up to the tunnel floor. The place smelled like the air after a firecracker's gone off.

The dirt walls of the tunnel were smooth and black now, a long dark shaft with a window of light far down at the other end. It was like a gun barrel. And it had acted like one—the explosion had caught the fleeing Jovians half-way down its length, shot them out like scrap metal. At this end, the breech of the gun had burst under the tremendous charge.

They stared at the gaping hole where dust was settling in the sunlight. Howard took Carmine's trembling hand and they stepped out through the hole. Neither spoke.

Around the hole was a junk yard. Twisted heaps of metal were scattered about the smoking wreckage of what had been a building. The broken shells of dead Jovians lay amid shattered glass and heaps of shredded metal where the dome had burst like a tin can. Howard saw charred masses of oozy red stuff spattered about the ruins. The thought machine had been utterly destroyed.

(Continued on Page 112)



# BLIND FLIGHT

By MILLARD VERNE GORDON

*Illustration by Bok*

**When the conquest of space is accomplished, do not suppose that it will be like navigating a celestial sea. Sailors see the sea but space-fliers may never see the stars!**

**E**DWARD SEDGWICK took a last glimpse at the steel sphere he was to occupy for the next few days, glanced once again at the blue sky, shook hands with the head of the Commission on Space Flight, climbed up the metal ladder and crawled into the circular orifice just under the sphere's equator. As he progressed on hands and knees down the narrow tubular passage, the hissings and clicks of the thick metal plug being fastened hermetically behind him, brought to his attention that he was now entirely cut off from the world of man.

The huge ball, toward whose exact center he so laboriously crawled, was about one hundred feet in diameter and perfectly spherical. Though the outer surface was honeycombed with vents and sensitive cells, there was no window or viewing porte of any description. Sedgwick was being interred alive in the middle of this globe of metal, yet, as the clicks of other metal partitions fell into place behind him, he was not afraid in the slightest.

He had wondered whether he would feel fear when the day for the real test came. Sometimes he had awakened at night with a cold sweat and a ghastly dream of burial alive in an iron coffin. Yet now, as he neared the little bubble in the core, he realized in a detached objective

sort of way that he was quite calm and collected. He knew that was the factor which had made him desirable for this job, nonetheless each time he realized it, it came as a sort of surprise.

Now he climbed down into the control bubble and the last disc swung shut, sealing off the passage. He seated himself in the heavily cushioned arm-chair that swung so marvelously on universal pivots. He could swing this chair around by merely shifting his body so that it could face any conceivable part of the perfectly globoid interior of his chamber. No matter to the fact that if he tried it now he might be hanging upside down. Very soon things like up and down would cease to exist save as unfunctioning markings on two or three of the innumerable dials and meters that studded the control bubble's interior. He could reach out with a hand and touch anything in it, so small was it, yet he was not stifled or crowded. He had switched on the air and conditioning mechanism as soon as he entered and he knew that the living conditions in the tiny room would remain habitable and comfortable indefinitely.

Fool-proof automatic controls were in operation. The air was constantly being cleansed and replaced. The temperature of the chamber would

never vary by more than two degrees no matter what the outside conditions were.

Sedgwick strapped himself in and swivelled around to face the planet-level controls. From his central position he was like the base of a will that drives a body from its hidden place in the skull-encircled brain. His eyes drifted easily over the readings with the skill that came of months' intensive training. Outside temperature on top of the sphere was 85, on the bottom 64. It was a hot day and the sun shining on the metal did that, he knew. He knew exactly which way he now faced and exactly what atmospheric conditions were. He glanced at the time and saw that he should start. He reached over and turned a switch. Power was on now and the lights on the sphere's exterior glowed. That was a signal to the crowd outside to clear away.

He allowed five minutes and then pressed eight buttons on the rocket panel and threw the master control. There was a slight jar and he felt his seat taking up the added pressure of his body. His acceleration meter was now in operation and he watched carefully as his speed mounted. The sphere was plunging upwards into the sky, his controls told him, the rocket vents on the earth-side of the globe blasting away. He set more of them into operation and his velocity increased sharply. As he watched his speed mount, he never let his eyes lose track of the other salient recorders. It was an old practice and he was not worried. His acceleration was steady, rockets firing in order, fuel flow proper, surface temperature changing rapidly, air-pressure

dropping swiftly. Tubes recorded no overheating.

A glance at the photosensitive meters for the surface cells revealed that it was now almost fully dark outside. Things were in perfect order.

For a half hour the great sphere continued its acceleration upwards. When finally the velocity dial registered what he wanted, the pilot cut the rockets entirely. Far in the recesses of the globe, automatic switches cut out the feed to each of the many rocket jets set near the surface and the explosive liquid fuel ceased to feed into the semi-atomic blasters. The sphere floated free. It was no longer in the Earth's atmosphere but in the realm of interplanetary space.

**SEDGWICK** noted that gravity had ceased now that the ship was at rest. He knew that his velocity, even with the rockets off, would continue unabated. The sphere had passed the escape-speed for Terra. It was in free space, the dials registered no pressure on the hull. To one side a dial noted a steady flow of heat, that would be the sun. On another side registered a dim flow of light.

That would be the earth-glow. The rest was darkness.

But the man was strapped in his seat and there was nothing loose in the bubble and, outside of the curious feeling in his stomach and head and the indisputable evidence of the omniscient meters, there was no evidence that the sphere was free of planetary gravity, free in the empty void between the planets.

From his photo-cells, the pilot

knew what things were like outside. He flicked another button and cameras in the surface, took a record of the scene, a record which would be much more accurate than anything he could see with the naked eye.

Sedgwick wondered whether man ever would see space with the bare eye. He glanced at another part of his controls and reflected that it was unlikely. Cosmic rays were bombarding the craft with incredible fury, unhampered by a hundred miles of atmosphere which alone kept life from being burned out of existence on earth. Here, he knew that only several shells of thick lead and steel, fifty feet of metal machinery in any direction, concentrations of chemicals and fuel, air supplies, food and swarms of wire, kept the cosmic rays from reaching him and torturing the life from his flesh.

Protoplasm is a very delicate chemical compound, the thought suddenly occurred to Sedgwick, and it must be kept carefully sealed from raw force. It survived only within certain very narrow limits of temperature and under certain very restricted conditions of gases. Here he glanced again at the conditioning charts but all was well. Those limited conditions that kept his metal fish-bowl fit for the fish were working to perfection. Metal and rubber, plastics and glass, electricity and atoms, all lifeless and unimaginative, were harnessed here to keeping the little bit of water and carbon mush that was Edward Sedgwick liquescent. The subjective term was "alive".

Still, this little bit of mush, this complex and unstable compound that

was man, had built for itself the means wherewith it could master the antagonistic cosmos. Here was man, here within this little bubble of air in the midst of this greater bubble of metal, bravely dashing around in the domain hitherto exclusively reserved for planets and comets and suns. Mankind had usurped the privileges of stars and Sedgwick was the first to exercise this conquest.

He reset his meters. His chair swivelled slightly. Rapidly his hands pressed a half dozen buttons. Acceleration started again. An integrator clicked out a set of numbers in its little glass face. They were set up on the controls and put to work.

He watched the glass panels as the maneuver went into effect. The ship accelerated again. The direction was different. The sun was below him. The sphere was heading away from the sun. The earth too was behind. Ahead was Mars. Not directly ahead but the sphere and the planet were both travelling towards the same point in space.

Sedgwick was not going all the way to Mars. He was going only part way there. Cameras would record further data and the globe would return to earth. Maybe it would go all the way to the red planet some day but this was only a test.

For two days the sphere continued on its course. Acceleration of the rockets had been cut off after about four hours. At that time the metal ball was travelling at an unbelievable speed. Sedgwick could have made Mars in a week at that rate but he knew his limitations and he had his orders. He had been given this post because of his level-headed judg-

ment, he did not betray that trust.

During those forty-eight hours, Sedgwick had little to do besides check his controls. He was fed regularly by an automatic panel which every four hours thrust pellets of food-concentrate at him and the nozzle of a water valve. Also he cat-napped when he felt tired. Automatic alarms would have awakened him if there had been need.

At one time there had been a momentary flickering of gravitation dials. There was nothing to be done, for what was detected was a sizeable body about fifty thousand miles away. The sizeable body being undoubtedly an asteroid of perhaps ten miles diameter. No concern.

Only one other thing broke the monotony. One of a cluster of photo-sensitive cells on the sphere's skin went black. It was smashed. A meteor obviously, a tiny pellet of rock flying through space. Sedgwick wondered why more had not hit him; he had expected more trouble than that. Then he realized that after all space was really terribly, terribly empty and besides it was possible a number of others had hit the surface where it would not be detected nor indeed make any difference.

**THE** sphere was brought to a halt at the proper time and hung in space slowly revolving on its own axis. It was now about six million miles from Mars and there it would wait for ten hours or so until the red planet had been thoroughly photographed by the telescopic cameras and recorded in other ways by other instruments.

The man could detect where it was by the glow registering on the surface cell clusters. He could tell where

it was by the gravitational directives functioning on the panels. He could tell exactly its mass and speed, his own speed, the Earth's, the sun's and every other major body's. He knew what their orbits were and what was to be done to bring the ship back to Earth.

He laughed to himself briefly when the thought struck him that he had now been in space almost three days and yet had not set eyes on the stars. It struck him that was probably the longest such period away from a sight of the stars that he had ever been in his life. And yet, actually, he was surrounded by them!

As he was setting the dials to bring the ship back in an Earth-bound orbit, another gravitational recorder started functioning. A body about ten thousand miles away, a small body. Presumably another wandering asteroid. They should be frequent here even though this was inside the orbit of Mars. Many asteroids crossed that orbit even though the majority stayed between Mars and Jupiter.

Casually Sedgwick computed the orbit of the new body, saw that it would pass well beyond him and paid it no further attention. It was not until after rockets were accelerating the sphere back towards the Earth that he noticed that his original calculation on the asteroidal body was in error. Apparently the mass would pass uncommonly close to where the sphere was. Perturbed over the original mistake, which should have been impossible, he speeded up the rockets a bit and shifted the globe slightly. It should be sufficient to put distance between the asteroid and the ball.

Later he noticed that mistake had again occurred. The asteroid was still heading for an intersection with his sphere. Either the tiny planet had changed its orbit, which was impossible, or somehow the wires and mechanisms of the outside sensitives were deranged. That was possible and it was also dreadfully serious. A meteor perhaps? It might have buried itself into something and created a short circuit somewhere. The dials showed no such thing though and it was unlikely that any single meteor could have fooled all the dials.

Again he shifted the sphere's course and this time he watched the dials registering the asteroid. Sure enough the gravitational sensitives altered slowly and surely to bring the foreign body's shift into a new orbit that would keep it on an intersection with the sphere.

Then Sedgwick noticed something else. That the speed of the asteroid had altered, had accelerated. If the fixed velocity of the little astral wanderer had been the same, it would not have mattered much where it headed. The velocity of the globe was so much greater and was quite capable of outrunning any natural body. But the speed of this strange body had altered; it had speeded up and it had not lost anything of the original distance between them. In fact the man now realized that it was accelerating even more than his sphere and was steadily closing the gap!

This was no asteroid. He was sure of that now. Coldly sure of it and he wondered at himself for his own coolness. Then with a start he recognized his own emotion. It was that calmness that settled over him

with every stress and emergency. This then was a serious crisis.

What was this body? He dared not think and yet he knew he must. There was one conclusion and one only. No comet, no asteroid, no meteor could change its orbit. No lifeless body could speed itself up and so diabolically and consistently keep its path in space so that it would overhaul and meet up with the sphere no matter what shift the latter made. This was, this could only be, an artificially created mass, an intelligently directed body, another space-travelling vehicle for an intelligent race!

But from where? From Earth never. From Mars then? Maybe. It was a likely possibility. He had approached Mars. He had hung for a while in space surveying it. Could it be that Mars was protected? That Mars was patrolled? That something was coming to investigate him?

Sedgwick had no mind to allow that. He knew several things. One, that he had no means of communicating with another space-sphere. Two, that his first duty was to bring back his sphere safe and intact with all its records unimpaired. Three, that if alien hands or alien machines tried to pry into his craft, it would almost certainly accomplish ruin and his death.

Therefore Sedgwick ran. Rapidly he activated rockets as fast as the increasing velocity and acceleration would permit. And as his speed increased, he kept refiguring his orbits so as to cut his path to Earth shorter and shorter.

AS the sphere ran, so did the pursuer. When one put on a burst

of speed, so did the other. Steadily the distance between the two bodies grew less. Hours went by and the sphere was blasting along at maximum possible acceleration. Now the alien body was close, was within a mile or so and still gaining.

Sedgwick was able to determine more things about the enigma. His registers were delicate enough to detect things they could not while it was far away. The other thing was several times larger than the globe, it was egg-shaped, and it had a high reflecting scale such as polished metal would have.

It was obvious that the pursuer must be gotten rid of within the next hour or all would be lost anyway. At this speed of travel, he would have to start decelerating soon or else the sphere would overshoot the Earth and never return. There was no further dodging or outrunning possible. Now he would have to fight it.

The ship had guns. Sedgwick had laughed at the Commission when they installed them. He had said that they could never expect to use them and now he knew that whoever it was on the Commission that had ordered them had had more foresight than seemed.

The guns were six in number, two at the poles and four along the equator. They did not project from the surface. Only the pit of their muzzles showed and they were covered with sliding metal discs when not in use. They were naval ordnance, loaded by automatic feeds, fired by the rocket fuel and hurling shells filled with terrifically powerful explosives.

The recoil of a gun firing was

taken up by automatic discharge of a blank shot from the gun on the opposite side of the sphere. In this way the course of the globe was not altered by the recoil.

Sedgwick shifted the sphere slightly until one of his polar guns was aimed at the pursuer. Then he waited. This shot had to be effective. He dared not miss or blunder.

Steadily the sphere roared on towards Earth and steadily the strange pursuer followed, closer and closer. It narrowed the distance from a mile to a half mile. Sedgwick was impelled to fire but restrained himself. Through his head floated the old Bunker Hill injunction about waiting for the whites of their eyes. This shot had to be good. He knew nothing of the armament of the mysterious follower, therefore his first shot would have to be the deciding one.

Now he watched the dials closely. The giant egg was a few hundred yards away. His finger rested on the firing button. For a second it hesitated and then pressed down.

He never noticed the shock for it was counterbalanced. But he saw the meter of the gun rapidly check off shots as shells slid one after another into the breach and were blasted off point-blank at the strange mass. One, two, three, four, five. . . .

Then suddenly the sphere received a blow as if a giant bat had swung and connected with it. The pilot's chair swung wildly about on its gymbals and all the instruments vibrated madly. When it had steadied again, Sedgwick saw that the sphere

(Continued on Page 113)

# PORTRAIT of the ARTIST'S MOTHER

*Illustration by Bok*



By DENIS PLIMMER

(Author of "The Unborn," "Louisiana Night," etc.)

**I**N New York's stately Metropolitan Museum hangs a small portrait in oils which shows a tired elderly woman seated in a dark room with her hands lying folded in her lap. Her hair is thin and quite white, her nose pinched and colorless, her mouth withered and sunken. Her eyes however have in them something which blinds one to the rest of her face. They are eyes which one would imagine in the head of Peter the Hermit or of Savanarola. Unbeaten eyes. Fanatical eyes. Eyes which testify more than any words could to an inner spiritual toughness which resists all sugges-

tion of defeat. Upon the face falls a pallid colorless light and strangely enough there is between the woman's eyes and this light which illumines her a certain relationship, as though both perhaps had their origin somewhere beyond the boundaries of our daily routine.

Below the picture, an engraved brass plate says, "Portrait of the Artist's Mother."

**I** SAW him first in the Armadillo Club, sitting by the window staring out at East Sixty-ninth Street.

He was a small, pinched, stringy

man in a drab brown suit. His shoes were scarred and thickly soled, his shirt-collar wilted and lifeless. I don't believe I ever saw a soul speak to him, nor did I ever see him address any of his fellow members. He just sat.

When the tall bronze clock in the outer hallway struck ten, he would rise and leave. In this manner were all his evenings passed.

You may be inclined to ask why I should care about this unknown and undistinguished man. All I can say is that some inner compulsion made me want to find out all about him. What he ate for breakfast—what his work was—where he was born—all those details, in short, by which a man is known (or unknown) among his fellows.

ONE evening a little after ten I made up my mind, and rang for the Club steward, a melancholy, precise, blue-chinned, over-starched man.

"That gentleman who just left, Steward," I asked, "What's his name?"

"Now let me see, sir," said the steward, running his well-kept fingers across his jaw with a great show of concentration. "Why, that would be—" he paused. "Isn't it odd, sir? I can't think of the member's name and it's just on the tip of my tongue too!"

"A little man," I prompted. "Always sits at the third window."

"And," continued the steward pensively, "always leaves at ten o'clock."

At that moment Colonel Battersea, usually an encyclopedia of club lore, hove in sight. We told him our prob-

lem and he chewed on his cigar thoughtfully.

"I know the man you mean," he said slowly, "and I'm sure I've heard his name. But I've forgotten it. Men like that are doomed to be forgotten. It's unfortunate but it's so. Why do you want to know?"

I realized the uselessness of trying to explain to the Colonel my peculiar interest, and I told him so.

"I quite understand," he mumbled. "Just a hunch, eh? Well, I'm sorry I can't help you. Goodnight." And he disappeared into the outer hallway.

ON the tall windows light rain was beginning to splash.

I decided on home, a book, and bed. As I was leaving the club, I ran into the Colonel, hurrying back up the steps.

"Forgotten something?" I asked him.

"No. Remembered."

"Remembered what?"

"That chap's name!"

"Oh. What is it?"

"Vogel. Oscar Vogel."

He started to speak further, when suddenly with a tearing crash and a flashing of lightning a typical summer tempest broke loose. The Colonel and I stood helplessly huddled in the doorway as the rain settled into a steady drumming upon the corrugated metal marquee over our heads.

"What's his business!" I shouted over the din of the storm.

"God knows!" the Colonel yelled back. "I'm going home before I get pneumonia! You'd better too! Tell you more about Vogel some other night!"

**H**OWEVER, I had no need to wait for the Colonel to fulfil his promise. The next evening I was at the club again and as the clock was striking eight, in came the man called Oscar Vogel. Same clothes — same shoes. The only difference was that he appeared, if anything, more miserable than usual.

I sat across the room watching him and trying to think up a decently original excuse to open a conversation with him. But the harder I thought, the more all normal topics of talk seemed outworn and jaded. I wanted some subject which would, without his knowledge, reveal something of the man himself.

He was extremely upset about something. He kept glancing nervously and when the club Secretary crossed the room he seemed to shrink down within himself as though he were trying to hide. Later, he took out a black battered notebook and referred to it with great diligence and anxiety. Returning it to his pocket, he withdrew a piece of paper and a pencil, and appeared to plunge into calculations. These seemed to deepen his gloom. He stared desolately at the frayed cuffs of his shirt.

He arose. Standing there outlined against the dark window he seemed a beaten man. He crossed the room rapidly and stood before me.

"Mr. Grant," he said, "may I have a word with you?"

"Certainly," I answered, trying to swallow the coincidence. "Won't you sit down?"

"Not here if you don't mind," he replied, glancing nervously about the room. "If we could find some—some

place where there aren't quite so many—"

"Let's go into the bar," I suggested quickly, knowing that in all likelihood we'd be able to find a quiet table in a secluded corner. If he wanted my time and attention, he should have it. I asked nothing better.

"The bar?" he said. "That would be fine. You're sure I'm not disturbing you?"

"Not a bit," I answered, rising and starting out.

"I hate to disturb people," he remarked as he trotted miserably along at my side. "I really do, but my case is urgent."

"Save it," I told him, "until we sit down."

**"I HATE,"** he began after we were settled and our drinks stood before us, "to impose on people. It's a terrible thing to do, I realize. But I've been watching you the past few evenings, and your face seemed the kindest and most understanding in the club." He paused to gulp down a quantity of whiskey which choked him so that he was reduced for the next few minutes to spluttering apologetically into his handkerchief.

Eventually, with swimming eyes, he continued.

"My name, by the way, is Oscar Vogel."

"I know."

"Do you?" He seemed all at once childishly pleased. "How?"

"I asked."

"You asked? Did you? How nice." He beamed.

"Mr. Vogel," I said, firmly stemming an imminent tide of soggy gratitude which I felt might engulf

me at any minute, "you're obviously in some sort of trouble. If I can help, I shall be only too happy. If I can't help, I'll tell you so. Now, what's it all about?"

"Mr. Grant," he said finally in a low, frightened tone, "I have no money."

This was a let-down and I blamed myself for being fool enough to lay myself open to a touch when I could ill afford it. He saw this thought mirrored in my eyes, for he reddened unbecomingly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Grant. I really am! I thought—I mean—I hoped that perhaps—but I'll run along—I—"

"Sit down," I said firmly. "You have no money, Mr. Vogel. Continue."

"I'm a poor man as you can see," he began again in the same frightened voice. "My clothes prove that. But there's no help for it. Some people in this world, you know, are not fitted to fight for a living. I'm one of those."

"You've had hard luck, you mean?"

"No, I'm not fitted. Hard luck may become good luck overnight, but incapacity never changes. And I'm incapable. I've tried to save. God knows I have! But it's been useless. My salary is so tiny. And now I'm behind in my dues here!"

"Why," I asked, trying desperately to be logical before this frightened, cringing creature, "why do you keep up the club at all? If you can't afford it, you must cut it out!"

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" He replied with startling earnestness. "I'd go mad if I gave up the club! It's life to me! Can't you see? I've got to have somewhere where I'm welcome

to sit among my fellows and watch them—watch them exist! You do see what I mean, don't you, Mr. Grant?"

I nodded.

"How much do you owe?" I asked.

He dropped his eyes to the table. Then his answer came in a tone so low as to be nearly inaudible.

"Thirty dollars," he said.

"Are you asking me to lend you that, Mr. Vogel?"

Again he paused before he spoke.

"Not exactly lend," he replied.

"I've got security."

"All right," I said.

His gratitude instantly erupted tearfully and when I gave him a check he almost kissed my hand in grateful abasement.

"Now, Mr. Grant," he said, when he had put the check carefully into his wallet. "I wonder if you'd like to accompany me to my—my home and see the security?"

I'd forgotten about that, but by this time the whole business was becoming such an odd mixture of the prosaic and the impossible that I agreed.

"What is the security?" I asked him as we started toward Madison Avenue.

"They're — paintings," he replied quickly.

"Oils?"

"Yes."

I became interested. Perhaps the man might prove to be one of those obscure passionate collectors who will go without lunches to buy a canvas six inches square. Perhaps, I pondered, he might have something good.

"Whose work is it?" I asked. "I mean, who painted your pictures?"

His reply was so sharply and mag-

nificantly given that I was startled and turned to stare at him.

"I did!" he said.

I MADE no comment on this remarkable statement. I felt that the time had not yet come to go further into the matter and that Vogel would in his own way and at his own time unknowingly show me the connection between the shrinking little man who sat in the chair by the third window of the Armadillo Club and the sudden proud-voiced stranger who confessed to being an artist.

We started down Madison Avenue at an easy swinging pace. I didn't ask him our destination for the walk was pleasant. The previous night's storm had washed Manhattan's air thoroughly until it was now as fresh and clean as the air on a mountain top.

We passed Forty-second Street and continued downtown through the once Aristocratic Murray Hill district until finally at Twenty-seventh Street we turned east. We covered block after block, the neighborhood gradually shifting from rich to middle class to commercial and at length to poor. A number of five- and six-storey walk-up apartment houses lined the street now, and in the middle of a block before one of these Vogel stopped.

"Here's where I live," he said timidly.

WE entered a dismal foyer, mounted flights of creaking, musty stairs until we reached the top floor where, taking out his key, he let me into a typical lower-class New York flat.

"Is that you, Oscar?"

It was an old voice — shrill and querulous. In the gloom of the entryway I glimpsed Vogel's face turned toward me anxiously.

"Yes, mama," he answered.

At the end of the apartment hall was a yellow square of light.

"This way, Mr. Grant."

I followed him into the drawing-room. It was an old room furnished in an old way. Over the door was a Victorian fanlight of carven wood. Opposite, was a large window looking out onto a blank wall of yellow brick. On the left was an arch hung with heavy tasselled drapes. The furniture was of a lightish stained wood, badly scarred and thinly upholstered. Every available inch of space seemed crammed with odds-and-ends. In a deep armchair near the open window sat a woman, poorly dressed, gray-haired, her features pale and pinched, her mouth withered and sunken, but her unearthly eyes indomitable, staring.

"Mr. Grant," said Vogel, "this is my mother."

"How do you do, Mrs. Vogel," I said, extending my hand. She ignored it, staring at the wall to my left.

"You're welcome here, Mr. Grant," she said and her gaze never wavered.

"My mother is blind," came Vogel's low voice.

I murmured something sympathetic.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Grant?" she said. "Any friend of Oscar's will find a hospitable reception here. It's not very grand, of course, but it's all we have, and we're satisfied, aren't we, my boy?"

Vogel shifted uncomfortably.

"Yes, mama, of course we are."

"Tell me something about yourself, Mr. Grant," said the old lady. "I like to hear news from the world, and poor Oscar is my only emissary."

"Not just now, mama," her son broke in quickly. "Perhaps Mr. Grant hasn't the time. Besides, he came here to see my pictures."

"Did you, Mr. Grant?"

"I'd be tremendously interested," I answered.

"I'm so glad! His pictures are superb, you know. And he works so hard on them too—so hard! All afternoon he's kept in a stuffy office, but in the mornings he's free, and then my Oscar paints his dreams."

Vogel looked at me uncomfortably.

"But," she was still speaking, "you'll see them for yourself, so why should I say anything about them?"

Something struck me as odd about these motherly remarks and at first I couldn't localize my feeling. Then I suddenly realized what it was. The woman was talking as if she could see the pictures!

"Are you a dealer, Mr. Grant?" she asked.

"Hardly that, Mrs. Vogel. Not much more than an innocent bystander."

"Shall we," suggested Vogel, obviously anxious to end the conversation, "go into the studio?"

"Whenever you like," I replied.

"You stay here, mama," said Vogel. "The studio might be drafty, and you know what your chest is!" He turned to me. "My mother's a chronic sufferer from chest ailments, Mr. Grant."

The old lady had risen quickly.

"Chest ailments nonsense, Oscar! Of course I shall go with you!"

She started rapidly across the room. I approached her with some

vague idea of guiding her or giving her my arm. Vogel drew me back hurriedly and after she had disappeared into the darkened entryway he whispered that his mother was able to find her way about the apartment and from it to the studio quite unaided, and that any offers of assistance were met by her with the bitterest resentment.

OSCAR VOGEL'S studio on the same floor across the public corridor was large, airy, well-appointed, and had great broad windows which, I imagined, would admit a fine flood of north light during the day. In the centre of the room was a gaunt dark easel upon which I saw an unfinished canvas. To my left the studio-wall was hidden by a five-fold screen about seven feet in height. The room was bare enough and there was no sign of luxury or soft-living, but I could have imagined no better workshop for a serious artist.

Vogel was obviously proud of it, for with the pathetic eagerness of an ambitious child he scampered about the vast studio, pointing out to me in short breathless sentences its various virtues, and showing me the panoramic city vista from the great windows facing north.

In the meantime, the old lady had seated herself upon a broken-down couch and seemed to have fallen into a reverie.

"How long," I asked, "have you been painting?"

"Almost thirteen years. The first three years needn't be counted for they were the years of study. But the last ten have been productive. On that easel is my ninth canvas still unfinished. I have worked almost a year on each one. I can't work quickly, you

see. My great ambition is to see ten of my canvases completed! Then I shall exhibit."

"Have you chosen the subject of your tenth yet?" I asked, chiefly because I had suddenly become afraid of the quality of his work of which he was obviously so proud.

At my question the old lady came out of her reverie.

"He has!" she shrilled across the room.

"And what has he chosen, Mrs. Vogel?" I saw that she was anxious to display her knowledge.

"He has chosen me, Mr. Grant."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Won't I be grand when my picture's done in oils? Portrait of the artist's mother, he's going to call it."

"That's right, mama."

"He's a good boy, Oscar is. You're sure to like his work."

"Of course," I said gently, "but at the same time don't forget that my opinion's anything but expert."

"That doesn't matter!" she returned tartly. "It's an opinion, isn't it? And Oscar's not painting to please experts!"

"He's painting then to please the public? Very wise indeed!" I suggested, thinking that the Vogel household was badly in need of any money Oscar's brush might earn.

"He's not painting to please the public!"

"She means," Vogel broke in, "that I'm painting to please myself. Don't think that it's arrogance on my part, Mr. Grant! It's just that I'm the only one I can really hope to please. I know nothing about the public. I haven't had enough experience."

"Perhaps," I concluded hoping to cut short this very unprofitable conversation, "we might have a look at

the pictures themselves."

At this, Vogel trotted nervously across the studio to where the screen stood, and his heels made little sharp raps on the uncarpeted floor as he moved. He placed his hand on the screen and I became sick with apprehension. If they should be bad (and they probably were) what was I to say? I could praise with my lips certainly, but a sensitive man like Vogel would easily discern my hypocrisy. And I was certain that one could conceal nothing from the blind woman who so easily dominated us both.

He pushed the screen to one side.

Behind it on the wall were eight small pictures. I started to move nearer, but Vogel caught my arm.

"Don't come any closer, please," he begged.

I stared at the assortment and the mother and son watched me catlike.

**THEIR** subject-matter was exclusively metropolitan. A scene in the subway, Sixth Avenue during a snowstorm, a paper-seller's stall in a patch of yellow spring sunlight, the city vista from the studio window, a driving rain along West Street, down-and-outers staring at the water from the Battery, a beggar huddled in a shop-doorway against the wind, and a tired bartender in an uptown saloon. The ninth picture on the easel I didn't examine. The tenth was still in his head.

The city of New York has been painted, etched, photographed and sketched many times, I know, but never with the same feeling as Vogel's work showed. He was not a great painter. Few are, but he was unusual. His technique was

stamped by no conventional social bias, no eccentric approach, no wanton distortion of line which so many modern painters require to express their message. Only one peculiarity did the paintings of Oscar Vogel show, and that was his treatment of light. The only other artist I could think of who showed this same pre-occupation with light was El Greco. But El Greco's lighting was lurid and unnatural with a mystic quality in it. Vogel's on the other hand was **merciless and bright**, even in his rain and snow pieces. It was as though a giant had turned a searchlight upon our civilization and had shown it up for what it was with blinding clarity. No comment was needed in Vogel's art. All his bitter submerged soul came through in that pitiless radiance which illuminated every sore on the beggar's skin and every speck of damp-rot in the wooden piers on West Street.

It was Vogel's gigantic reply to a world which had treated him so shabbily. It admitted of no rebuttal.

I tried to put this into words as delicately as I could and I knew that he understood me.

**SUDDENLY** the old lady spoke.

"I talked to Edward this evening before you came in, Oscar," she announced quietly.

This commonplace remark seemed to disturb her son. His voice was shaky as he said to her, "Tell me about it later, mama. Not now."

"And why not now?" she asked sharply. "I'm quite sure that Mr. Grant would be intensely interested. Wouldn't you, Mr. Grant?"

"This baffled me. Vogel broke in.

"You mustn't mind my mother, Mr. Grant. She—she has a fixation."

"It's not a fixation," she exclaimed unperturbed. "It's a sober fact."

"What is, Mrs. Vogel?"

"Well, you see, apart from his painting, Oscar is a boy of very limited imaginations. He can't believe that my husband comes to see me."

"And why shouldn't he, Vogel?" I asked.

"Oh, because he's dead," muttered Vogel. "Mother goes in for spiritualism."

"Oscar, I've implored you time and again not to say 'spiritualism.' The word has become so hackneyed lately."

"You mean, Mrs. Vogel," I asked, "that you actually talk to — to your—?"

"Of course I do. Why not? I'm a medium!"

"Now, mama, you're not and you know you're not!"

"Be quiet, Oscar! I ought to know surely!" Her voice soared with indignation. She turned to me. "You see, Mr. Grant, my son who is quite clever on most subjects chooses to be blind on this one—the most important of all. I'm a medium. Not professionally of course. I merely have the natural gift of being psychically receptive. There's nothing at all mysterious about it. It's a power which I've developed since I lost my sight. You've often heard of such things, I dare say. With most blind people, it's hearing that improves. With me, it's psychic receptivity. We've all got it to a certain extent but it's stronger in some than in others. It's perfectly natural and quite normal!"

"It's sinful, mama!"

"Sinful? To talk to my dead husband? If I were talking to someone else's dead husband I might agree with you."

I smiled.

"Please, Mr. Grant, don't encourage her!"

"Stop treating me as a child, Oscar!" she cried furiously. "I won't have it!"

"It's only that those trances of yours are so bad for you, mama. They injure your health. I'm sure of it!"

"Well," she retorted, "it's my health to injure, I suppose. If I choose to shorten my days, it's my business as long as it makes me happy! If you knew a little more about the meaning of death, you'd understand. It's not important. Not important at all!"

"You mean," I said quietly, "that you're not afraid of death, Mrs. Vogel?"

"Of course not. Why should I be, when Edward's told me all about it."

Vogel's face had suddenly become weary as though the argument were to him an old and a tiresome one.

"All right, mama," he said trying to smile, "when I die, I'll come back and paint a picture for you. How would you like that?"

The old lady grumbled something about ignorant scoffers, rose, and trundled off to bed.

"YOU mustn't pay too much attention to my mother," said Vogel when he was sure she was out of hearing, "she's old, you know, and not strong, either bodily or mentally. She's not responsible for herself." He paced nervously across the room. "I hope," he said, returning to his usual timidity, "that I haven't spoiled your evening."

I assured him that he hadn't.

"That's kind of you," he muttered, "but family quarrels—family quarrels! I detest them!" His voice

changed. "You really like my picture, don't you?"

I reinforced my earlier opinion and begged him to put them on the market.

"Not yet," he told me earnestly. "Not until the tenth is finished. Then I'll try to find a gallery."

"Why do you insist on having ten?"

"Because they'll be an integrated whole when I've done them. You'll see what I mean then. There's a philosophical connection between them. And besides, in my heart I know that I only have ten pictures in me, and I may as well wait until I can exhibit all my work at once."

I said nothing.

"When will you come and see us again?"

"Whenever you'll have me."

"Would next Tuesday," he suggested fearfully, "be too soon for you? I'll have my ninth finished by then. I'd like you to be the first to see it."

So we decided on Tuesday.

THE days passed quickly until Tuesday evening found me again in the house on Twenty-seventh Street.

Vogel answered the door himself, and I was instantly sickened by the terrific change which had taken place in his appearance. Sickened and amazed. In the few days which had passed since our last meeting, every ounce of flesh had fallen from his body so that his poor clothes hung upon his withered frame loosely and in great folds.

"I've finished the ninth picture, Mr. Grant," he told me, and his voice was bodiless and wraith-like.

"You've been ill" I replied sharply. "What's happened?"

"I don't know." He passed his

transparent fingers across his pale forehead.

"Are you in any pain?"

"Not now. It was while I was painting, but I'm used to that. I'll get over it. Come and have a look at the ninth."

In the studio, the screen was already drawn to one side, and the ninth picture hung upon the wall in line with the other eight. It was a picture of the barges along Coentics' Slip, huddled together darkly. A brilliant morning sun shone down on them and the water sparkled. Upon the wharf a figure lay grotesquely extended, face-upward, yes unblinking in the morning glare.

"I saw him one morning myself," said Vogel softly. "He was dead. Starvation."

It was easily the best of his canvases and I told him so.

"One more," he answered smiling faintly, "and I shall be ready to exhibit."

I was sure of the sensation his work would make among dealers and critics, and I urged him to finish the tenth as soon as possible. He replied that he intended to begin the following week.

Finally, I asked after his mother.

"I don't know what to think about her," he said. "She will insist that she's a medium. It's all nonsense of course, but she really does go into trances and it's killing her."

"Has she been doing it lately?"

"Several times. It leaves her as weak as a kitten. She has only two ideas now. One is her psychical conversations with my father which she swears really happen. The other is my tenth picture." He paused a

moment staring at the evening sunset which slanted redly through the huge open windows. "My tenth picture has become an obsession with her. I almost believe she'd give her life for it." He shuddered. "Or mine!"

He sat down weakly on the couch.

"And another thing," he continued, "you remember that foolish remark I made about coming back after death and painting a picture for her?"

I did remember.

"She's taken it seriously. She's made me swear to try if I should die first."

He became silent, sitting huddled in his too-large clothes, his frightened eyes staring at nothing.

"And that," he concluded, "shows you her state of mind. I mean, surely I'll outlive her, won't I?"

He was looking at me eagerly as one does when one anticipates a comforting word. I realized that he harbored within him a terrible constantly gnawing fear of death!

"Of course you'll outlive her!" I replied as jovially as possible, but despite the expression of relief which flickered in his large eye, I knew that I was lying.

FOR the next few days I saw nothing of Vogel, and my interest in him having waned somewhat, I didn't seek him out. Then one night I dropped in at the club. Colonel Battersea met me in the hallway and we had a few words of gossip concerning a coming re-election of club officers.

"Oh, by the way," said the Colonel finally, "that Vogel."

"What about him?"

"Dead. Heart."

The Colonel started down the hall to the street.

"Ironic thing," he called back to me. "He'd just paid all his back dues too!"

THE following day I called at the apartment but no one answered the door. I thought I could hear sounds in the studio but there too my knocking went unnoticed.

Several days passed. I wrote Mrs. Vogel a note of condolence, received no reply, and let the matter slip from my mind with the rather superficial comment that it had been a pity he had not been able to finish his tenth picture.

One night I found myself by accident on Twenty-seventh Street and again I called. No one answered. Out on the street, I looked up at the huge window which I knew marked the studio. To my surprise there was a light there—a peculiarly palling colorless light. It burned quite steadily.

I remounted the stairs two at a time and again knocked furiously on the studio door. No one answered. My knocking reverberated through the empty corridors and down the deep dimly lit stair-well. Then silence and as before a faint shuffling within the studio. It was uncanny and my heart grew cold with unexplainable fear. I turned tail and fled down those stairs like a frightened child, resolving nevertheless that the following morning I would find Mrs. Vogel if I had to break down the door.

Three weeks had passed since her son's death.

WHEN I got into bed that night I was cold although the night was warm. My sleep was broken constantly. I kept waking up and tossing about, adding a blanket, throwing

one away, or patting my pillow into a different shape. I finally awoke at six, unrefreshed and weary. One thought was uppermost in my mind and that concerned the blind mother of Oscar Vogel. I shaved, bathed, dressed, and was downstairs before seven.

IT was a fine sunny fresh morning with the barest trace of a breeze ruffling the foliage of Central Park through which I walked. The dew lay lightly on the grass, and the sky was serene. All the green-painted park benches were cleanly fragrant with the astringent dampness of morning, and each reddening leaf on the trees had its tiny jeweled outline of shining drops.

Fifth Avenue was still asleep when I reached it, but Madison was waking up, as a few merchants unlocked their shop-doors and climbed delicately about among the goods in the windows, arranging displays to catch shoppers' eyes. A clumsy watering truck was spraying the streets and the damp drops hung dazzlingly in the air, making tiny shimmering rainbows in the morning brilliance.

This, I thought to myself, was my beloved New York at its best and most appealing, and yet I could have none of it for the spectre that lurked in my mind of a blind woman in a gaunt studio staring with useless eyes at nine canvases on a wall.

I HAD reached Twenty-seventh street and I turned east. Three creaking wagons filled up and banked high with fresh fruit and vegetables from the downtown markets lumbered down the street. An apple rolled from a heap and landed at my feet. Its skin was russet, glowing, fresh,

and its radiant health emphasized by contrast by own sick thoughts.

I reached the Vogel's house, before which the stout overalled janitor stood sniffing the morning air. Once on the top floor, I turned to the closed apartment but was held in my tracks by something which I hadn't noticed before: a small heap of letters and circulars, mute witness to the fact that that door had not been opened for many days.

I approached the door to the studio, which still stood closed. I raised my hand to knock, then dropped it again at my side. The fresh morning air had not seeped into this place, and the musty odor of the old walls and year-weary corridors oppressed me. I was tempted to hurry downstairs again into the sunshine, and to put the unwholesome affairs of the Vogels out of my thoughts forever. I longed for the sun and the voice of people. I longed for another sight of that russet apple lying upon the gray pavement. I longed for anything which might negate the atmosphere in which I found myself. But I could not force myself to leave.

I knocked firmly on the door.

It was not locked, and the force of my knocking swung it open a few inches. I tried to push it further but it seemed blocked by some heavy piece of furniture inside which had been placed against it. I pushed with all my weight. There was a rough tearing sound and the door swung inward. Momentum sent me sprawling after it. Something soft caught my foot, and I fell across the dead

body of Oscar Vogel's mother.

**SHE** lay there horribly twisted, for it had been her slight weight which had prevented my entry, and in forcing my way I had pushed her body across the rough floor cruelly.

Her face was the face of one who has been through great agony, both of body and of spirit. I have seen such an expression since on the face of a man who died after bearing upon his back for many hours the crushing weight of a huge steel girder in a hurricane-demolished house, and I have seen such an expression also upon the face of a brilliant novelist, found dead, stretched across the completed manuscript of his mightiest work.

The place was dim for the long drapes were drawn across the closed windows. The air was indescribably poisonous. The reek of paints and of paint remover, and the subtle odor of mortality filled the place to its dimmest corners.

I swept the curtains aside and the morning sunlight flooded in like a benediction. I swung the huge windows back and the cool air swept through the room triumphantly.

**I** TURNED back to the body. Tightly clenched in its hand was a brush of fine camels hair, and upon the gaunt easel was a portrait of a tired withered woman with a great light in her eyes.

It was Oscar Vogel's tenth.

And upon it, the fresh paint still shone damply.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!

## THE LAND OF LIVING DEATH

by ROBERT W. MURPHY

# The Coming Of The COMET

By DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

(Author of "Bones," "The Hat," etc.)

**W**HEN the young farm hand who was also an amateur astronomer laid down his astronomical tables for the last time and realized that the comet he had discovered seven hours before would intersect the Earth in forty-three days, ten hours, twelve minutes, he did not believe his figures. But when the astronomers at Yerkes, Budapest, and Greenwich checked his observations in the next two days and came to the same conclusion, the people of the Earth awoke to find that they were due for some minor excitement.

Minor, as the papers and scientists explained, because even though the comet would graze the earth, a comet after all was rather immaterial. A small nucleus of meteoric rocks which would completely miss the planet and a long imposing tail of extraordinarily rarefied gas which would pass into the world's atmosphere. When it was explained that the Earth had passed through comet's tails before and that the only result had been ruddy sunsets for a few days and when the people of the seven continents found out that the consistency of a comet tail was somewhat thinner than the interior of an electric light bulb which was a practical vacuum as far as business went.

The two billion persons looked for-

ward to the magnificent display that they would soon be treated to as the comet would loom larger and larger in the heavens and many people bought telescopes and field glasses for the sights. It was a rather happy occasion, poets thought, this visit to our planet from another of our celestial fellows.

As far as scientists and world governments were concerned the joy ended abruptly a week later when confidential statements were sent out from leading observatories with the spectographic analysis of the comet tail. It was revealed beyond the shadow of a doubt that the chief gas in the tail of the visitor was the dreaded and most closely guarded military secret Gas D. It had been first worked out experimentally in 1918 by a German who had promptly codified his discovery and blown his brains out. It had been rejected by the military experts when all realized its impossibility of control.

Gas D was anti-life, pure and simple. Its effect was that the presence of a single molecule in a living system would be sufficient to disrupt the living forces and bring about almost immediate death. It was a catalyst disrupting life. And the comet would fill the Earth's atmosphere with a thin but definite veil of Gas D. Rarefied it might be, but still billions and

trillions of gas molecules made it up. Within two months all life would have ceased to exist on Earth.

A call was sent out for a world conference of science to be held in Chicago at the earliest instant.

**DR.** Elbert Sanderson, Ph.D., F.R.S., etc., was probably the world's greatest physicist and mathematician. It was said that not more than a dozen could follow his cyclopean advances in the realm of higher mathematical and astrophysical study. It was probably an exaggerated estimate.

Sanderson stood now, in the centre of his great study, reading the full report on the comet. With it was the request for him to attend the conference to save the world. He stood now, a powerful figure, his massive brow furrowed, his mane of gray hair standing wild, his piercing eyes boring into the papers. Again he read the figures and mentally checked them. Then, with a gesture, he threw the papers on his desk and stared straight up at the high ceiling.

The next thing Dr. Sanderson did was to sit down on the floor. Then, bending forward, he set his head against the deep soft rug, balanced his hands firmly beside his head and raised his body. Soon the physicist was standing on his head, alone in the room.

For three minutes he remained that way staring at the panelling at the bottom of his book lined walls. Then with a graceful swing he brought his body sharply down and sprang upwards onto his feet. He gave a sharp loud yell.

This done, he sat down at his desk, cleared away papers and started to work on the comet problem.

Three days later the Chicago con-

ference was called to order. There was a very brief speech of welcome from the worried man who headed the American group and the business of the gathering was plunged into.

For two days they debated every possible measure and at the end of that time they realized several things. One was that there was no known way of neutralizing or destroying Gas D; two was that the comet tail would definitely come into the Earth's atmosphere and nothing could stop it; three was that life on Earth was doomed.

It was about the time that they arrived at those conclusions that Dr. Sanderson arrived. When he strode through the door of the hall, a hush fell over everyone. The futile discussion ceased and every eye watched his impressive figure as it stamped up the aisle and on to the rostrum. Brushing aside the silent speaker, Sanderson stared aggressively at the audience.

"I have found a way," he roared suddenly, "to prevent the comet's tail from coming into contact with the atmosphere." He stopped and stared at them.

There was a period of utter silence and then from the delegates there arose a hysterical shouting and cheering. For forty-eight hours they had been in continuous session and every minute had shown the despair the great Sanderson had smashed closing over all of them. Now, at last, the gloom.

The physicist stood there, still scowling, then raised a hand. Silence fell on the gathering.

"There is no time for nonsense or talk. Our hours are limited. The work we must do is great. The method I have found is a method of so ionizing our atmosphere, so charging it that

it will exert a repulsive force on the comet gas. The tail will swing away from the Earth, will avoid it entirely."

There started another burst of cheering which was silenced by Sanderson's abrupt wave.

"To do this we must start at once. Every electric light bulb on the planet must be specially prepared and lit. With every bulb, and there are billions of such all over the face of the globe, emanating its own light, altered as I shall direct, the atmosphere will become charged with the proper charge. We have still several weeks. We must start at once.

"I have here," and he pulled out of his briefcase a mass of papers, "the facts in the case. I have here the formula for the wire which must be wrapped around each bulb, the intensity of the current which must flow from the power generators, and the mathematics which prove my point." He stopped again and stared at the gathering.

"I must ask you to accept my figures immediately before the process of checking them finishes. If they are right, and they are right, the work must start at once. The several days of checking will be too great a delay."

The audience knew what he meant. There were so few who could follow his work and even they were divided amongst themselves in their evaluations of it. Sanderson's last three Field Theories were still matters for hot debate among the world's mathematicians. Yet they felt that in this emergency they must trust Sanderson. All else had failed. Sanderson had a solution. Sanderson was confident. His life was at stake as well as theirs, but he could not be wrong.

Without further ado, the learned minds voted to accept his discoveries

and to proceed at once to have the people of the Earth follow instructions.

Sanderson stood on the platform and gazed at the gathering. He bowed to several, smiled grimly, and then without further unnecessary words, stalked across the platform and into the little antechamber adjoining it. He closed its door and threw the bolt, closed the other door and locked that.

Taking his coat off, he bent down, placed his head on the floor, raised himself on his hands and stood on his head for two minutes. He then sprang to his feet and gave a sharp yelp. Replacing his coat, he opened the outer door and left immediately for his train.

THROUGHOUT the planet people were busy the next five weeks wrapping wire around bulbs according to the methods shown in the papers and explained over the radios. The power plants put on double and triple staffs as their loads were continued at peak, day and night. Cities and towns and hamlets were as brightly lit night as day. Every bulb of the countless numbers that existed was burning brightly. As the bulbs burned out, they were replaced. The electric light factories in Pittsburgh, Prague, Kharkov, Leeds and everywhere else were working day and night to replace them. In China, as in Brazil, as everywhere, the wire makers were turning out the wire for the job and the mines worked day and night to supply the metals that made up this formula. For five weeks two billions of people, white, yellow, brown and black, worked entirely at the same task. The comet would be stopped. Sanderson's plan was being

(Continued on Page 113)



# THE LONG WALL

By WILFRED OWEN MORLEY

It was just a high stone wall in Maine. It was not different from any other save for one queer thing—it had but one side and no matter how you tried, you could not get over it.

*Illustration by Hall*

**M**ICHAEL rolled down one of the front windows and knocked his pipe speculatively against the frame, sending little chips of faded blue paint flying. "Are you quite sure," he remarked, "that we should have turned left at that sign?"

"Wouldn't swear to it," mumbled Crosby. He sidled the car to a stop. "Let's rest awhile, anyway. Roust out the maps, and we'll take bearings after a sandwich or two."

They emerged onto the tufty grass, shaking off muscle cramps of various sizes and shapes. No breath of air was stirring. Above them the sky was spotted with motionless clouds, minus birds of any kind. No scurrying animal life showed itself on any side. They masticated assorted sandwiches between yawns and let the sunlight drench them.

Crosby shied a pebble across the well-packed road at the high wall gracing its other side. "Quite a thing, eh?" he ventured.

"Yeah." The two examined the edifice at leisure. As far as they

could see in either direction it extended, unbroken, unmarked. Ten feet, all of that, it rose, dull and grey, the stone of it well weathered. There were no distinguishing signs, no places where grass, vines or trees eclipsed it. Behind them and far ahead, it ran parallel to the sandy road until the far horizons swallowed it up.

"Must be miles long," Crosby whispered, wondering why he dropped his voice. He paused as if to pick it up again. "When did we hit it?"

"After we made the turn. Some time after. In fact," added Michael slowly, "I don't believe we came upon it until a moment or so before we stopped. I was looking at both sides of the road, and who could miss that? I didn't notice it until just before I asked you about the turn."

Crosby turned and stared at the wall as if expecting the structure to explain itself. "It's odd," he stated. "A wall like this should be marked on the map; it should have some sort of reputation, too, don't you think?"

Signs saying 'You are now ten miles from the famous Long Wall' and so on.

"Who built it? Why should an immense thing like this be constructed out in the heart of the wilds? This territory doesn't look as if it's ever been settled. Maybe it was cleared once, but I'll bet that's all. We must be at least thirty miles from the nearest town."

"More than that," Michael added. "Have you noticed how quiet it's been since we made that turn?" He strode over to the wall, his eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Look, Clyde. It seems to be made of just one piece. I can't find any sign of separate stones in it at all."

The other joined him. "Where did it start?"

"I don't remember, though I'd say offhand not more than half a mile back. Perhaps less."

Crosby drew out his watch abstractly. "12:30. What say we take a little walk before going on? Half an hour's exercise."

"Good idea. I have a yen to hike around this affair. Look, you start down that way and I'll head on. We'll meet after a while and then try to figure out how big this thing is."

Crosby ruffled his hair, a far-away look in his eyes. "It may be longer than we think."

"Then say we walk for fifteen minutes, each following it in the opposite direction. At 12:45 we stop, and, if the other isn't in sight, we turn around and come back to the car."

**MICHAEL** started briskly down the road, whistling thoughtfully between his teeth. There were a lot

of things about all this that didn't fit. First of all it was ten feet in height. Why? Perhaps there was nothing wrong with that--after all, he didn't know what the approved height of a wall might be, yet it did seem overtall. Call that point one then, even if it might turn out to be okay. Point two: how was it made? You could not figure out how it had been put together. He ran his hand over it. Yes, it felt like stone. But there was no sign of any breaks in it; no separate stones or mortar; no cavities; no appreciable irregularities. Very well, then. Point two: composition.

What was it that was odd about the top of it, now? He let his eye run along its shelf. Nothing there, nothing at all. Ah, that was it. There was no sign of anything at all behind it. No house, trees, bushes, or vines. Nothing leaning over. When they got back to the car, they must walk away from the wall until they could see what kind of land might be on that other side. Point three, then, was upkeep. For, obviously, the gardener, or whoever it was, had to keep on his toes to prevent anything, vine or whatnot, from marring the unbroken, clean appearance of the wall. Was there a fourth point? Yes, there was. Life, or rather the absence of it. They hadn't seen a bird or small animal for how long? They hadn't been annoyed by insects of any kind during lunch. And Maine, in this time of the year, was swarming with insects of all varieties. No swamp-draining of any kind was likely to prevail here. Of course, the fact that they didn't seem to be near water of any kind might account for the lack of mosquitoes. But there should have been flies, ants, grass-

hoppers, beetles, daddy-long-legs, and all manner of just bugs.

He stopped to look around bewilderedly. Nothing but grass. A large expanse of open field lay to the right of him, blending finally into wooded hills near the horizon; to the left of him, the wall.

He lit a cigarette and strode on, crumpling the empty package, tossing it against the base of the wall. At length he saw something up ahead, on the other side of the road. As he approached, he made out the outlines of a car, parked over to one side.

His fifteen minutes were up, he noticed, as he flipped the butt away. Well, why not go the rest of the way to that car, see if the occupants knew anything more about the wall than he did. Perhaps they, too, were puzzled. Crosby was nowhere in sight, so the wall must certainly be longer than they expected. Some day, he thought, they must come back and make a thorough tour of it.

His aplomb burst into shreds when he saw, upon coming closer, that it was their own roadster. How in hell could he possibly have gone around the wall, made a complete circuit? Dammit, he had been walking straight, straight ahead and there had been no sharp turns or slow curves. He was positive of that. Yet, here was their car, up ahead of him when it should have been behind. And there, by Jove, was Crosby, coming up from behind him with an equally amazed expression on his face.

"Where did you come from?" demanded Crosby.

Michael's stare was incredulous. "What happened?"

"I hoofed it for fifteen minutes, then started back. And all of a sudden, I see you up ahead of me. One instant there was nothing at all in front of me except the car. The next, I see you between me and the car."

Michael gaped at him in silence for an instant, then turned, making a gesture with his hand. "Come on. We'll both try it. Get your waten out and keep your eye on it. What's the time now?"

"12:50 to the tick."

"Good. We'll see if this happens again, and if it does, exactly how long it takes."

They strode on in silence, Michael taking out his pipe and stuffing it as they did so. One must not try to think this out now; one must observe. Observe carefully, meticulously. Would it happen again?

The stillness about the place began to crawl under his skin, yet he didn't want to break it. There was nothing to be said at a time like this. He shuffled along the sandy road meditatively, started looking carefully at the base of the wall. Ah, there it was.

"Keep an extra careful eye out now," he whispered. "If it's going to happen again, it will happen now—or rather, soon. What's the time?"

"It was just 1:03 when we passed the empty cigarette package."

Michael's eyes were fixed up ahead. There was nothing but empty road, reaching up to the rim of vision, and the expanse of field to the right. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing—

There!

"Time!" he gasped. "What's the time?"

"1:08 exactly."

He grasped Crosby's arm as they both halted. "Look up there."

Almost at the horizon was a dark speck over to the right of the road. And—what else was it? Why, the horizon was near. An average person can see a good many miles on a clear day, particularly on an almost-flat terrain like this. Yet, he knew from past experience that their car, for that is what the speck was, was not more than a quarter-mile away.

Considerably less, in fact.

**THAD WING** struck a match on his shoe and applied it to the oversized bowl of his corn-cob, surveying the two travelers as he did so. "What," he asked, "did ye do when ye found that ye couldn't walk around the wall, Mr.— Mr.— excuse me, I didn't rightly ketch yer last name?"

"Michael," he grinned. "I'm Gerry Michael and this Clyde Crosby."

"Oh yes, pleased ter meetcher, Mr. Michael. And you, Mr. Crosby, would ye be any relative of that feller who sings?"

Crosby chuckled. "None at all."

Wing nodded pleasantly. "Good thing," he commented. "Them crooners is all right so long as they remain a small tribe. But as I wuz sayin', what did you fellers do when ye found ye couldn't git around that wall?"

"Next thing we did was to see if we could find out what was on the other side. We walked back into the field over by the side of the wall until we could see over it."

"And what did ye see?"

Michael looked downcast. "Nothing. That is, nothing worth the effort. It was just an open field, running into wooded hills. Exactly like

the side we were standing on.

"We both felt disappointed, and I think we would have gone on if it hadn't been for something that happened accidentally." He turned to Crosby. "Suppose you tell him, Clyde."

"It wasn't much of anything," said Crosby. "I slipped on something and went down on my knees. When I got up, I looked to see what it was, and found a little colored rubber ball. The colors had pretty well faded, but there was a definite design to it. Well, I picked it up and threw it away, the way anyone would. I watched it and I distinctly saw it go over the wall. Just about cleared it so that it should have fallen just a little bit on the other side.

"But when we got back to the car, my eye caught something across the road. I went over to it and picked it up. It was a rubber ball. **The same rubber ball I had just seen go over the long wall.**"

"I might add," put in Michael, "that I was watching the wall all the time as we walked back toward our car. If anything had come back over that wall, I would have seen it."

"That," continued Crosby, "was just the start. I picked up the ball again, and just tossed it over the wall. You saw me do that, didn't you Gerry?"

Michael nodded.

"So I turned around, ready to get in the car, and **there was that ball on the wrong side of the wall again.**"

Crosby drank a glass of water hastily. "I was about to throw it with all my strength, this time, but Gerry stopped me. He suggested we take one of the paper plates we'd used for lunch and skim that over, then look for it on this side. **Just to**

make sure, we marked it in blue pencil. I told Gerry to do it this time, so he hefted it over, and we both saw it sail neatly over the wall and out of sight. Then we turned around and started looking for it.

"We found it in less than 30 seconds.

"That made us both feel pretty sore. Either something pretty horrible was going on, or our senses were deceiving us, or someone was playing a joke on us. We decided to go over the wall ourselves. I'm smaller than Gerry, so I climbed up on his shoulders and pulled myself on to the top of the wall. I stood there for a moment, looking in all directions. It looked just the same over there, except that, of course, there was no car parked by the opposite side of the road—in fact, there was no road on the other side of the wall.

"I balanced myself right, then made a jump, landing very nicely. And the first thing I saw when I straightened up was our car. A second later, Gerry was telling me I'd jumped over on the wrong side."

"Excuse me if I interrupt, Clyde," broke in Michael, at this point. "I was watching Crosby from the ground. He stood there, looking around him, as he said, and his back was to me as he prepared himself and jumped. I clearly saw him go over the wall. Yet, an instant later, I turned around, and there he was behind me. And I didn't hear any impact of his landing."

"I did," said Crosby.

"We tried it once or twice more," continued Michael, "then finally we quit. Partly because we were disgusted, and partly because we were beginning to be scared. It frightened

me and I'm not ashamed to admit it."

WING knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "I'll tell ye," he said slowly, "what I can about that there wall, and it ain't very much now. That wall has been there fer as long as I can remember, and as long as my father can remember, and it was there when his father came and settled the land here. This ain't a very old town, mister. I calculate it began to be settled not moren a few years before my grandfather came here, after the War of the Rebellion. We all come from Connecticut, but that's beside the point. Anyway, you can see that the wall's been there for at least a hundred years, and maybe lots more because they ain't nobody who knows anything about it before around the 1840's or late 30's when they first cleared the land in these parts.

"I recall that my father told me about it and grandfather told him. 'Theys lots of things, son,' he said to me, 'which may seem peculiar to you, but so long as they ain't hurting you, don't bother about them. Just leave 'em alone.' And that's the way all of us around here look at that wall. It's there and that's all there is to it. Ain't never hurt anyone yet and it don't look as if it ever will unless some fool goes and bashes his head into it, and then it wouldn't be the wall's fault. People don't come on it very often, and when they do, most of the time they don't notice anything wrong with it, except that maybe they'll be sort of curious as to what it's doin' way out here.

"So I ain't tryin' to tell you what

you ought to do, Mr. Michael and Mr. Crosby, but since ye asked me about it, I say forget about it and leave it alone. They's lots of things to fight against that are hurtin' people and ye don't need to find somethin' inoffensive like a wall."

"Has anyone ever tried to do anything about it?" asked Crosby.

"No one, 'ceptin' Ben Gaylen. He was the son of old Jim Gaylen—well, it's no use t' go into that because you, bein' strangers wouldn't know Jim Gaylen from Adam. He always was a bookish sort of lad—this was before my time—and he was determined to find out all about that there wall. He didn't. He went mad. I seen him onct myself, in the asylum, and it made me sick. So I'm repeatin', ye'll do well to ferget about that wall."

"WILL," began Crosby, "if I didn't know you better, I'd call you a damn liar. Are you positive you couldn't see the wall once you got off the ground?"

Bentley nodded. "There's no two ways about it, Clyde. That wall's the damndest thing I ever came across. I fly over this way pretty regularly, and I thought there was something wrong when you called me up and told me about it. You couldn't help but notice a wall like that after a while.

"But the fact is—and it's just about as easy to believe as what you found from experimenting—that you can't see that wall from a plane. And I've flown pretty low over this part at times. You saw how low I was a few minutes ago."

Michael nodded. "Did you get the pictures?"

"Sure did. We'll have them de-

veloped right off the bat."

"Well," said Michael, "I guess we're ready. Got the flags, Clyde?"

Crosby nodded. "Okay then. We'll go up and you set those three flags in a triangle. As soon as I spot them with the binoculars we'll get into position, then I'll jump. You'll see whether or not I come down behind the wall."

Crosby fixed his helmet, climbed in, and waved. The autogyro sputtered a moment, then eased up gracefully as he watched. Quickly Michael set the three large red flags in a triangle and waited.

There wasn't any wind this day, so it shouldn't be too difficult to make the jump right. It would be annoying if Crosby landed on the nearer side of the wall—but then, they'd merely try again. Well, they had all day; they'd make it or know the reason why.

He fixed his glasses on the autogyro. Ah, they were about ready, he thought. Bentley was hovering. There! There went Crosby twisting and tumbling with a grin on his face as usual. For an instant he saw only a hurtling black speck, then a great white mushroom sprouted out of it and the abrupt fall was halted.

Slowly, almost agonizingly slow, Crosby came down. It was clear, now, that he would land behind the wall. There could be no doubt of that. And, if he couldn't get over, Will could always land behind the wall and fly him out.

Michael cheered wildly as he saw the drifting shape float down on the other side of the wall out of sight, saw the white web of the parachute slowly hauled down. Then, with a sudden stab of premonition, he turned around—and clutched at the

nearest flag for support.

Crosby was behind him.

"WE'VE found," summed up Michael, "through careful experimentation, that we cannot go around the wall—you go for a certain distance then you find yourself, abruptly, back where you started; we cannot go over the wall—you jump over, and parachute down, and you find yourself on this same side, even though an observer can clearly see you go over. So, we're going to try to go through the wall."

"That seems to clarify matters well enough," commented Bentley.

"What about the pictures?"

Bentley made a wry face. "Not one came out."

"Why not try," suggested Crosby, "digging a hole under it and coming out the other side?"

"I was going to suggest that," remarked Bentley. "That's why I brought along these long handled spades. A wall like that shouldn't have a very deep foundation. Not so deep that you couldn't easily tunnel under it. Want to try it first?"

The others nodded. "I've no desire," put in Michael, "to mar this thing with blasts if I can possibly satisfy my curiosity any other way."

The three picked up their tools and fell to. The ground, once broken was not difficult for digging and in about three-quarters of an hour they had a good sized pit extending far under the wall. Bentley, who was in the lead, yelled suddenly:

"Hey, I've broken through. C'mere and look."

The others gathered about him. There could be no doubt about it. They had broken into a tunnel similar to the one they were digging. A

tiny patch of darkness lay ahead, beyond which a shaft of light could be seen. Eagerly they pressed forward, climbed up the other opening.

Bentley began to laugh hysterically. For a moment, they stood unbelieving, then realization struck them. They were back where they started; their car waited on the other side of the road.

"I'M all right now," insisted Bentley. "It just seemed so damned funny when I came out of the hole and saw it."

"So now?" asked Crosby.

"We blast."

"Do you think it will do any good? Suppose we do blow a hole right through the damned wall? Won't we find, when we go through it, that we're right back here?"

"We blast," said Michael quietly.

"Gerry," pleaded Crosby, "let's get out of here. Let's get out of here quick and pretend that we could go through it if we wanted to. I can't stand much more of this."

Michael shook his head. "We've come this far; we've got to go through with it. If you'd rather go, I'll wait until tomorrow. Are you game, Will?"

Bentley nodded. "I'll stick."

Crosby buried his face in his hands. "You're right," he murmured. "We've got to finish it now. We'll never be sane again until we find out—and if we find what I think we'll find, we'll never be sane. Never!"

He nodded to Bentley who picked up a drill and held it firm while Crosby smote it heavily and accurately with the hammer. The reaction, they noted, was no more or less than what one would expect from ordinary fence stone. They took turns in holding the drill and swing-

ing the hammers.

"Okay," said Bentley quietly. "We're ready to blast."

The others watched in silence as he prepared the dynamite and set the fuses. Then the three of them ran to a safe distance.

The explosion was neither more nor less than they expected.

"Reactions perfectly normal," stated Michael. He led the three over to the wall. A large section of it had been blown out, leaving a deep cavity. Fragments of stone were on all sides and several large chunks they dragged out and threw aside. The wall now had a mark upon it, a hole of particularly dark darkness.

Crosby poked a spade handle into it. "It's awfully deep," he ventured.

"Got a flashlight?" asked Michael.

"In the car."

He returned after a moment, bearing a rope. "This doesn't make sense," he admitted, "but then neither does anything else about the wall, so I'm not taking chances. Three pulls on this rope will mean I want you to help me back."

Silently he fastened the rope around his waist, turned on the flashlight and crawled into the hole. The others stared after him, trying to comprehend the peculiar blackness and apparent depth of the cavity. Numbly they watched the rope play its way out, then came the three warning tugs. They started pulling until at last the familiar form of Michael came into sight.

Yes, it was Michael. Only some-

thing in him had died and they knew he would be like that for the rest of his days. When he spoke, it was in a sort of hushed whisper, and they didn't have to be told twice to start picking up the chunks of rock and shoving them in the cavity.

THE next day they came back with cement and made a finished job of sealing it.

The only thing he would tell them was that he dropped the flashlight and it went out, but the light kept on going. He could see the shaft of light from the extinguished flash drifting slowly away into the unending blackness, a shaft of it etched against utter black.

Somehow, they knew he was not telling all, that he would never tell all.

Michael can be seen these days and you'll find him normal enough if you can overlook a few eccentricities and you aren't too sensitive. By the latter, is meant—well, it's hard to explain. You either get it when you see him or you don't. But whatever never turn out a light in the presence, and it is best to speak in reasonably loud, clear tones. He is likely to start screaming if you whisper.

And sometimes he awakes in a cold sweat, gasping about a shaft of light drifting away into utter blackness, drifting away from its source: an extinguished handlamp.

And somewhere in Maine stands a long, high wall, marred only by a single spot where, as can be seen, someone tried to break through. . . .

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!  
**PLANE EQUATOR**  
 by STANLEY WHITESIDE

# *Ambition*

by

WILFRED OWEN MORLEY

He stood upon the rim of time and whispered:  
night,  
Let me explore your face and know each wheeling  
star  
Upon it; let me plunge into the seas of light  
Which bathe strange worlds, unknown, in galaxies  
afar.  
And let me learn the baffling music of the  
spheres,  
And with these cosmic notes new melodies create  
That I may rout with song the multitude of fears  
Which chain the human soul in endless war and  
hate.

For I shall go beyond . . . . Outside the mortal  
ken,  
Beyond the walls of time, the veils of life and  
death,  
And pluck forbidden fruits from trees unknown  
to men,  
And listen to eternity's last gasping breath.  
He sighed: my mad desires are vaster, far, than  
all  
Creation, although I am pitifully small.



# The God of Oo

By ALLEN WARLAND

*Illustration by Bok*

**A fantasy of perfection and imperfection. A tale of a quaint city in the jungle and the curious fate that overtook a very clever thief who came there.**

**T**HERE are two ways to enter Oo. One is by way of the Zoon, that narrow, deep river that runs through all the jungle continent of Ild-Chundarath and carries the craft from all the little nations and cities and unnumbered tribes that have their domain along its heavily overgrown banks. It is by way of Zoon that nearly everyone comes to the city, that the little moon-sailed vessels of Gul and Tindorion and Luul come floating down the turbid waters from inland mountains and come to rest at half-sunken, moss-covered wharves that stand on rotting logs sunk in the muddy bottom. Some unload their cargoes of rare spices and strange fruits from the interior; others, perhaps, put in only for the night, for none desire to sail along the river in the starless darkness of the Evening Star, wherein abound dangers not to be described.

The sailors do not mind putting in at Oo, that wondrously strange city, the like of which is not to be found elsewhere. They like its smiling, fat little people with their chubby faces and ever readiness to burst out into peals of hearty laughter. They like the quaint little shops and the narrow winding streets and, best of all that which tickles their fancy, the queer towers and objects made in Oo.

All this lies along the waterfront. There is the heart of the city, there

lies the soul of Oo, towards the river it turns its face. But it is in the back of the city that the second entrance lies. In those semi-deserted stretches the high dank jungle presses against the ancient crumbling walls and long green vines hang down from the branches out-thrust over the wall and push their way along the streets, seeking the cracks and devices with which to entrench themselves and slowly, with the passing of centuries, to tear apart the pavements and buildings.

To one approaching Oo from the jungle, it springs up suddenly. There is the dense steaming flora all about. The thick underbrush and tenuous downhanging vines and fungi from the great age-old trees. The traveler will follow one of the little winding trails in the dim twilight beneath the dripping ceiling of green. Once in a while he may get a glimpse of the bright silvery sky and then he will plunge again into the dimness. The air is filled with the little noises of the primeval forest. The little squeakings of the tiny lizards and rodents, the leathery flutter of unseen wings, occasionally a tiny bird-bat will soar out and utter a plaintive grunt and flap hurriedly away.

Far off there might be a thumping

as some monstrous animal goes along. Then, utterly without warning, the traveller will catch a glimpse of a grey tower peering through a break in the foliage. A strange tower, seemingly partially broken down, for the top of it will be incomplete as if there had been another chamber there but time had caused the walls to fall away in parts and reveal the interior. Then the viewer will know that he has indeed reached Oo. For nowhere else are there such towers. In a second one will almost run into a lichen-covered wall so overgrown with green moss that it will take one quite by surprise. And, in the wall, if the traveller has come the right way, will be a little door studded with tarnished brass.

That was how Woth of Druun came to Oo. He came through the jungle path and went through the little door. And none saw him because nobody comes through that way and few dwell near there.

**WOTH** was a tall thin man clad in the skin-tight sombre garments of his native land. Typical of Druun were his ways, for which reason he had not cared to be seen by too many. For the people of Druun believe in Swish, the God of Darkness. And Swish teaches that all things belong to any who have the ability to take them. For, according to his ideas, those who can make off with what is another's successfully must be wise and clever and skilled in silent cunning. And perhaps Swish may be right. Who are we to tell?

At any rate, Woth walked down the stone paved alley upon which the door opens, taking care to step

over the ground-clinging vines and the wide cracks in the blocks that made up the street. He did not make any noise, for the men of his city never make noise. He did not take any missteps, for the men of Druun never make mistakes. None saw him enter, and any that saw him after did not regard him with suspicion for the people of Oo are very friendly and, besides, no one ever comes in by way of the jungle.

Woth traversed rapidly the back part of the town and soon entered the wider, better kept and more frequented streets where the life of the little city lies. And as he passed into these parts and went among the populace and the inhabitants, his manner changed. He lost his furtive quiet airs and assumed a peaceful, unhurried stroll and a gay smile. He nodded here and there to make people think he had many acquaintances and he joined in the laughter of the shop-keepers and sailors. But as he walked his eyes and hands were busy. He took in, in his easy glance, all the little details and hints of the homes and shops around him that make the difference between the expert and the bungler. He never hesitated to assist passersby in their little troubles. He helped the little old ladies in their quaint robes to carry their bundles. He assisted the funny plump shopkeepers to make sales to the gullible river men, never hesitating to assure them that the purchase was very excellent. He would be there when anyone should slip on the pavements and would always graciously help the person to his or her feet. And by and by the long deep pockets of his clothes began to sag and become very bulky and heavy. For Woth was always repaid for his

kindness, even if involuntarily.

The tall slim man from Druun passed in and out of the crowds around the riverfront and the streets by it and took in the sights. He noticed the bobbing yellow-and-crimson-sailed craft from the hamlets and numerous little kingdoms up the river. He saw the long slender-prowed vessels from Ligg and Mlara, which cities sit on opposite banks and stare at each other down the current, and he took in with interest the sight of the big ship from Yarlion at the very mouth of the Zoon. He looked at its green and scarlet striped sails and its carved prow and gleaming sides of jetty tonthus wood, and made a note in his mind to visit that city some day.

But mostly his attention was on the town about him. For Oo is a most unusual city the like of which might never be seen again on the face of any of the globes of the sun. Not for nothing is it called the Unfinished City. For it is indeed unfinished. Every tower and every structure is incomplete. Each of the many stone towers that top every house of any importance ends in that half-complete chamber on top. Exactly as if the builders had suddenly been called away and never got time to come back and finish. And every wall and house has a corner or a section that is not complete. In everything there was some imperfection. In the clothes of the people there are parts that seem unfinished. In the tables and three-legged chairs there is some part that is not polished or colored or carved and that makes it imperfect. Even the very names of the people drawl off into hints of something left unsaid. If you go into a shop and buy something you will

find it incomplete. For the things that are made in Oo are never perfect.

The ships come down from the mountain lands and bring the raw material. They carry the colored woods of the high land trees, the rare metals from the mines of Tindorion and Thard, the skins from jungle overgrown Amoth. All these are carried down to Ooo. The little people of the Unfinished City work upon them and fashion them into the things for which each is best fitted. But they leave them incomplete, whereupon the sailors come and take them away to the ports further down to be finished and rounded off beautifully.

WOTH became most amazed at this constant imperfection and somewhat annoyed, for he was a connoisseur and it pained him to see these things with imperfections that marred their value. He sat himself down before a little dispenser of liquid refreshments, and, as he quaffed his not entirely filled goblet (for which he had not paid the entire amount), he spoke to the smiling keeper.

"Tell me, oh man of Oo, why is it that nothing here is perfect in your most respected city? It finds me most astonished."

The dispenser of liquid goods looked at him with blank incredulity. "Surely from what far off land do you come, oh man of dark garments, that you know not of us? I thought that none did not know of Oo and its God."

"Indeed, oh most honorable man, my land is so far off that you would not know its name," lied Woth

glibly. "But, tell me, why is nothing here perfect?"

The shopkeeper answered sonorously as if repeating something he had learned by heart. "Nothing is perfect save Noom. And Noom is the God of Oo. None but Noom can make anything perfect. We who are only his children and his servants can not make anything truly complete. Were we to try, it would be only folly, for truly no man can make a thing so perfect as to pass the inspection of the All-Seeing Eye. And so to show our great respect and reverence for our God, we do not attempt it."

The man from Druun pondered this a minute. Then he voiced his thoughts.

"That is a most wonderful belief, oh man of Oo. I would fain see Noom, who alone is perfect. Can you direct me to his temple?"

The smiling native nodded and pointed out the way. He bade him go and see for himself the greatness and perfection of Noom. Woth bowed to him and passed away through the crowd to the place indicated. Down the crooked street of the wine merchants, he passed, and into the narrow way of the fur workers. Finally he entered a great square.

**I**N the center of the square stood a huge building. It was highly decorated and elaborately carved. Edges of gold and great diamonds which are quite common along the Zoon ornamented the white-domed structure and made it truly beautiful. The four scarlet towers each ending in a fused mass of gold as if the tips had been burned by a bolt from the clouds made a remarkable fitting for it.

Woth crossed the square and went to the open doorway. As he entered through the carved golden archway his eyes caught for a moment those of a little man clad in a flowing purple robe squatting at one side of the entrance. The little man was fat and old and his eyes twinkled merrily as he looked into those of Woth. But Woth gave him scarce a glance as he passed inside.

There was a semi-darkness in the interior. He saw, lined all along the wall of the great circular chamber, hundreds of little statues each facing the center and each was an unfinished model of the great statue in the center.

The figure of Noom was carved out of a single colossal block of bluish white stone. It was a figure of a semi-manlike creature, squat, very bulky, and fat. On its broad face, resting on the bulky body, with no sign of a neck between, was an expression of amusement. A grin split the features and the eyes almost twinkled as one looked at them.

It was truly perfect. After seeing the incompleteness of the outside city, one could almost believe in Noom's divinity. For every single bit of the great body was carved with a minuteness and perfection that defied detection. No matter how close you got to the image you would find it perfectly carved. Every pore and every almost microscopic mark to be found on a living creature was there. Almost would one think that Noom was indeed alive.

But that was not what caught the eye of the thin visitor. What he noticed was the necklace that hung around Noom's neck. It was composed of hundreds of little miniatures of Noom carved out of innum-

erable rare and valuable stones. One in particular caught the experienced eye of Woth. That was a figure about an inch long carved out of a single flawless lynquar gem. Woth almost collapsed when he saw it. The lynquar, rarest stone in all Vesper. The beautiful gem that glowed with its vari-colored inward eternal light that was unlike anything else in the universe. He saw instantly that it was worth a kingdom if he could secure it. Woth glanced around.

There was none about. Nobody was in sight. Woth could detect no secret peep-holes that might indicate an unseen watcher. And if Woth could not see any, there were none to be seen. Quickly he reached out a hand, snapped the chain that held the valuable bauble on its central band. Bringing his hand down in almost the same motion, he dropped the gorgeous jewel into a little hidden pocket made for such things.

Woth turned and strolled unconcernedly out. Although he was intensely excited, he showed not one sign of it. Leaving the temple, he advanced across the square and soon was lost to sight in the crowded streets.

But the little fat man crouched at the entrance smiled strangely and glanced inside with his curiously sharp eyes. He dropped back to his seat on the pavement with an enigmatic nod, and a soft chuckle.

**WOTH** passed through the inhabited part of the city in the same easy manner as he had arrived. But he made no stops or offered aid. He soon reached the back section where the great jungle slowly creeps its ways in. He threaded his way stealthily now, for he did not want

to be seen on that part of his trip. As he passed through the wall, he glanced once more at the topless towers of Oo and then carefully shut the wooden door behind him.

Through the steaming jungle he passed, swiftly threading his way through the hanging vines and thick boles of the strange fernlike trees. He travelled swiftly and silently over the thick carpet of fallen ferns. In a few hours it was dark. The pitchy blackness of a Vesperian night was upon him. In the sky, no star showed, no planet nor moon sent its rays to pierce the black. For the cloud belts hang eternal over the Evening Star and never clear.

In the darkness, the jungle awoke. Dull thuds and sharp, angry grunts broke the silence. A woosh of wings sails through the sky above the forest. Tiny things slither across the ground. A faint glow sometimes shows as one or two luminous animals come moving across the scene. But then is the time when all the things smother into a frightened stillness for the only beings that dare to show lights are those that fear no one. Those are the ones to be avoided. And every once in a while there comes a short burst of agonized screeching and a thrashing about as something unseen pounces upon something invisible.

High in the bole of a tree, Woth lay sound asleep. He feared not the darkness, for those who worship Swish are under his protection and are never harmed at night. And so he slept.

It was day again. What fearsome things had occurred at night about him, Woth did not know or care. What terrible voices of lost souls might have muttered about his tree,

did not interest him. Swiftly he made a meal of bat meat and fruit, and went on through the jungle paths towards his native city hidden deep in the unknown interior of Ild-Chundarath many days away.

**TWO** days had passed. He was far from Oo and far from any known land. Woth was hurrying swiftly along an animal trail under the shade of the great trees. He came to a part that crossed an open stretch upon which the hot light of the clouds flowed uninterruptedly. As he was about to step out into the open, he saw something move in the green on the other side of the space. Accustomed to the natural inhabitants of the fern forests, he recognized instantly the presence of man. Woth dodged back.

Nothing showed itself on the other side. He waited. Now his ears caught a sound. He looked behind him. There was someone coming along his trail. He watched hidden. In a few minutes, he saw three men come into view. Short and plump they were, dressed in queer robes such as were worn in only one place. And all three were smiling. Woth cast a glance at the other side of the clearing. Sure enough, three other men had stepped out. Also short and plump and smiling broadly.

Woth stared aghast. They must have followed him all the way and trapped him neatly. They could easily have passed him, he saw, since they could use the river and streams and take advantage of the few inhabitants. Woth swore strange weird oaths under his breath.

The men began to advance to where he lay hidden. Woth took out the tiny miniature of Noom made of

the priceless glowing lynquar, and giving it a last look, placed it in his mouth. He leered through the foliage at his pursuers, and then, with a violent effort, swallowed the gem.

He proceeded to step out onto the path in plain view. He looked at the newcomers and removing his skull cap made a sweeping bow.

The six men from Oo looked at him and seemed to smile even more broadly. Woth smiled back at them and queried in a friendly manner.

"Ah, good men, what do you want of me? Is there anything I can do for you?"

The little men smiled even more broadly than before, if that were possible and one said pleasantly:

"We were searching for a little ornament that has disappeared from Noom the perfect. Do you know nought of it?"

The man from Druun returned his smile and said blandly: "Would that I could help you, sirs, but alas I cannot. I have not seen it."

The leader answered: "We shall have to continue our search then. May we come along with you, for we are not experienced jungle travellers?"

"Most certainly," answered Woth not in the least perturbed. "I should be delighted to have you with me."

They took up their journey together. The little men were very jolly and Woth was eternally jesting with them and asking about their God. He thought of an amusing notion and asked them,

"If it is true that none but Noom can do anything perfectly, then how could you ever find the one who made off with that which you seek? For would that not be bringing your quest to a perfect conclusion, which would

be blasphemous?"

The little men laughed queerly and replied,

"Oh, we will never complete our search. But Noom will. The Perfect God will exact his own punishment and deliver the evil-doer into our hands."

Woth smiled to himself and thought of how easy it would be to do away with these foolish men in the night. He wished it were dark already so that he might do it and go to sleep. For he felt very weary and his legs dragged heavily.

In a few hours he was feeling exhausted and dull. The gem seemed to lie on his stomach and grow and grow. His joints were becoming unusually stiff and painful.

When night came, he was able to stagger to a rest, and fell asleep instantly, deciding to put off his task till the morrow.

The next day he felt even queerer. He had little inclination to keep on, and felt decidedly heavier and stiffer. His head was very dizzy and sunk into his shoulders. The stone in his insides seemed to be stifling him. He felt himself visibly shrinking. The

little men about him never seemed to take notice of his strange illness but always their smiles grew broader.

**B**EFORE the temple of Noom in the city of Oo on the banks of the River Zoon sits a man. He is small and fat and he watches with his strange smile the people going in and out of the Temple of the Perfect One. And sometimes when he sees somebody that is tall and thin, he laughs to himself and glances, still chuckling, to a place inside the temple.

There along the wall, one among many others, stands a small stone statue. It is as an effigy of Noom carved out of a single priceless lynquar gem. It is as large as an ordinary man and quite an excellent representation of the squat god of Oo. But like all things in that city, it, too, is unfinished. For where there should be twinkling stone eyes, there gleam forth two black human orbs that stare with an unearthly horror out at the scene before it. And if you place your ear to the hard stone sides you may hear a dull thumping as if of a heart beating eternally in the interior.

**DON'T MISS**  
**THE UNHOLY GLASS**  
by Robert W. Lowndes



**THE LAST VIKING**  
by Hugh Raymond



**THE DEVILS**  
by Allen Warland

**In Our Next Issue!**

# FIRE - POWER

A NOVELETTE

By S. D. GOTTESMAN

(Author of "Dead Center," "Dimension of Darkness," etc.)

What can be done when all the battlestrength of a democracy is concentrated in the hands of a cosmic navy with dictatorial ambitions? That was the problem Bartok of the Intelligence Wing faced and had to answer.

*Illustration by Doglov*

## CHAPTER I

**T**INY, trim, Babe MacNeice descended the very secret staircase that led into the very private office of Intelligence Wing Commander Bartok.

"Hello!" he gasped as the wall panel slid aside. "You're on Magdeburg's 83—or aren't you?"

"There was very little doing there," she smiled, seating herself. "Except a bustle and roiling about as I left. It seems that someone had kidnapped their HQ secretary and sweated him for some information relative to their new interceptors."

"Have they any idea," asked Bartok anxiously, "who that someone was?"

Babe laughed. "They have the finger on him. From some confidential instructions he dropped while making a getaway they learned that he was secret agent for some Venusian colony or other. He was described as a thin old man of effeminate carriage and manner."

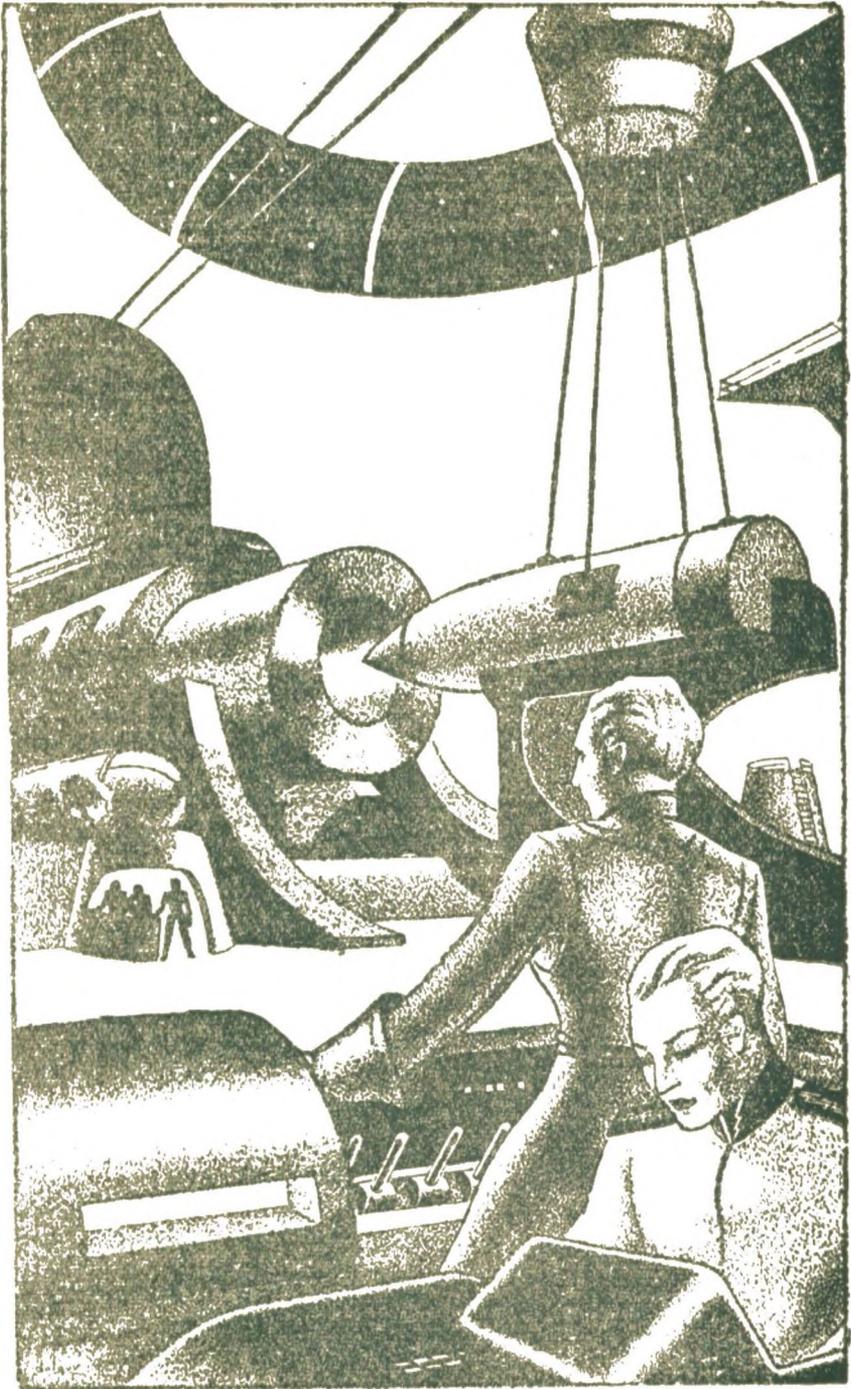
Bartok smiled, relieved. "Your number twelve. Report, please." He started a phonograph turning and pointed the mike at Babe.

The girl said chattily: "MacNeice went per orders to Magdeburg's 83 for confirmation or denial of rumors concerning a planned uprising against Terrestrial authority. There she found widespread reports of similar character; the entire planet was flooded with propaganda.

"Information was conclusively—ah—secured—from an official to the effect that the colonial governor, Allison by name, was fomenting an insurrection by means of which he would be able to assume supreme authority over the planet and defend it against terrestrial forces. That is all." She lit a cigarette and stared dully at the floor as the wing commander sealed and labeled the report record.

"That," said Bartok, "sews up Allison in a very uncomfortable sack. We'll send a cruiser tonight."

"Sure," said the girl. "He hasn't got a chance. None of them have against the insidious Commander Bartok and his creatures of evil. That's me."



"And don't tell me you don't love it," he grinned. "I know better. In the blood, that's where it is — the congenital urge to pry into other people's affairs and never be suspected. It gives us a kick like two ounces of novadyne."

"Speaking of which," said Babe, "are you dining alone tonight?"

"Nope. I have a standing date with my favorite little voyeur whenever she comes back to Earth. Scamper along to get dressed; I'll meet you in two hours at the living statues."

**THE** show-place of New Metropole, capital of the All Earth Union and Colonies, was the Square of Living Statues. Bathed in ever-changing lights, the groups of three men and three women, moulded from the purest gold and silver and assembled with every artifice of the year A.D. 3880, changed steps and partners, moving through the hours of the day in a stately dance that was never twice the same in even the smallest step.

Grouped on a lofty platform the heroically proportioned figures were the focus of every visitor to the wonder-city of all time and space. There was absolutely nothing like them in the universe, nothing like their marvelous grace that would balance a three-ton male on his toes while whirling a two-ton female partner in a vast arc, all to the most subtly exquisite music that could be evolved from supertheramins and electroviolins. The music too was completely automatic. The divine harmonies came from nothing more than a revolving drum which selected at random sequences of tones and

the companion coloring of the lights that flooded the statues in their dance.

In a glassed restaurant Bartok and Babe were dining. Through the walls filtered enough of the music to furnish a subdued background to lovers' talk. But when these two got together it was business. As the wing commander had said, it was something in the blood.

"MacNiece," snapped Bartok, "I am not arguing with you, I'm telling you. You are not going to do any such damfool thing as walk in on our piratical friends and confront them with what you doubtless think of as 'The Papers'. I'm going to get this melodrama out of your head if I have to beat it out."

The girl's face was flushed and angry. "Try that and you'll get yours with an Orban," she snapped. "I say that if you bring it right home to them that we're on their tails they'll give up without a struggle and we've saved so many lives and so much fuel that a medal for me will be in order."

"The cruiser," said Bartok, "leaves tonight. And that settles everything. Forget, child, that this wing of the service was once its brains instead of its eyes and ears. We are now officially an appendage devoted to snooping, and the glorious history of the Intelligence Division is behind us."

"Fitzjames," she muttered, gritting her teeth. "I'd like to take that Admiral of the Fleet by his beard and tear his head off. And don't tell me you aren't in the project body and soul." Mocking his tones she said: "I know better."

"Off the record," admitted Bartok. "I may opine that our tiny suite of

offices has more brains in its char-ladies' little fingers than the entire fighting forces have in all the heads of all the commanders of all their mile-long battlewagons. That is, naturally, gross overstatement and pure sentimentality on my part. Eat your Marsapples and shut up."

She bit viciously into one of the huge fruit and swallowed convulsively, her eyes drifting through the glass wall to the living statues. They were performing a sort of minuet, graceful beyond words, to an accompaniment from the theramins in the manner of Mozart.

"And what's more," barked the wing commander in an angry afterthought, "the body of the space navy could dispense with us at will, whereas without them we'd be lost. You can't exist for the purpose of making reports to nobody. What good would your spying have done if there hadn't been any cruiser to be sent off to bomb Allison's capital city?"

"None at all," she snapped at him. "Only I don't like the job if it has to mean taking guff from every half-witted ensign who graduated because he knows how to work an Auto-Crammer. Barty, you know and I know that they hate us and check up on everything we send in. The—the sneaks!" Abruptly she was weeping. The wing commander, indecisively, passed her a handkerchief. Women! he was thinking. Sometimes they could be thoroughly opaque to reason. Any man could see through his sardonic recital of rules. The wing commander detested the well-set-up officers and gentlemen who would not and could not move until he charted the course. The wing commander had a healthy contempt for any and all formality

and routine, with which the naval service was weighed down as with tons of lead. But the wing commander was, first, last and always, of that unalterable cast of mind which makes the superb, chilled-steel military spy.

**I**N all the records of the All Earth Union and Colonies navy, there had probably been no such man as Bartok. Back to the days of the Herkimer scandal there had been a succession of brilliantly proved men in his office, but for resourcefulness and the spy's temperament he had had no equal.

He would have gone far in the old days; further than any intelligence man now could. Many years ago, when Earth had only a few hundred colonial planets, the news suddenly broke that there was a virtual dictatorship over the navy by the Intelligence Wing. Herkimer, since painted as a scoundrel of the deepest dye, had been merely an exceptionally enthusiastic officer.

The course his enthusiasm ran included incidentally the elimination of much red tape in the form of unfriendly fleet officers; that he regretted as unfortunate and even tragic. But his mission of expanding Earth's culture and civilization to the stars would not brook interference. Classic scholars could scarcely avoid a comparison with the Roman emperor Trajan, who pushed the bounds of the Empire to the absolute limits of the Western world, and created a situation which hastened the fall of Rome by centuries.

Since the Herkimer affair they had been very careful with the Intelligence Wing. Once it was almost abolished for good; a few years of operation of the fleet practically blind, with

no ground laid for them or information of enemy movements proved that to be impractical. But they did what they could to keep the spies within bounds. It was an actually heart-breaking situation to the executives of the Wing. But you can't keep the voyeur instinct down; that was what they were chosen for and that was how they operated.

Take this affair on Magdeburg's 83. It was an insignificant outer planet very far away from New Metropole. Yet the filtering of rumors brought it into the brilliant limelight of the Wing. The body of the fleet could not move less than a mile-long battle-wagon at one time; the Wing — personified by Commander Bartok — dispatched tiny, trim Babe MacNiece. She returned with the information that a hitherto trusted colonial officer had decided to play Napoleon and was secretly fortifying the planet.

In the last analysis, lives were saved. The single cruiser could send a landing party and take the trusted colonial officer back to Earth for trial; surely a preferable alternative to a minor war with the propaganda-inflamed ophidians that were native to the planet.

Wing executives did not speak—in private—of their love for the body of the fleet. They held to the stubborn conviction that there was nothing dumber than a flag-ship commander, nothing less beautiful than a flag-ship.

## CHAPTER II

AT about that time, things were popping on the Lineship Stupendous, two million miles off the orbit of Venus. On it was jammed the en-

tire Headquarters Wing of the All Earth and Colonies navy. In the very heart of the ship, inside almost a cubic mile of defensive and offensive power, was Wing Commander Fitzjames, by virtue of his command Admiral of the Fleet.

"Not a murmur," he said to his confidential secretary, a man named Voss. "Not a murmur from the crew." He lolled back in his chair and breathed easier under his chestful of medals.

"They don't know," said Voss. "When they find out—!"

"Stick to your shorthand, son," snapped the Admiral. "When they find out they'll keep on carrying out orders very much the way they always have. They're picked men on this ship. Now take this down: General Order to all Lineship Commanders. By authority of the Admiral you are empowered to govern any and all citizens and subjects of All Earth. An emergency has arisen which makes it absolutely necessary to eliminate opposition to this program. Your direct superior is your Wing Commander who is responsible only to ranking members of the Headquarters Wing. A list of proscribed persons will follow."

The Admiral lit a cigar with an unsteady hand. "Code that," he said. "Send it in twenty minutes."

"Anything else?" asked the secretary. "How about the Wing Commanders? Are you coming clean with them?"

Fitzjames stared at the metal ceiling. "Take this: Confidential Memorandum to Wing Commanders. From Admiral of the Fleet Fitzjames. You are hereby notified that the Headquarters Wing of the fleet has voted to take over power from the hands of the Executive Committee of All

"Earth." You are on your honor as officers and gentlemen to support this move by your brothers in arms. You will continue to patrol your regular sectors, having dispatched details to attend to the physical acts of taking power. No planet must be left under a Colonial Governor acting by right of a charter from the Exec All Earth. Details follow. Report to **Stupendous** immediately in code. We are seizing Venus as a base."

"Right," said Voss. "So go ahead and seize it."

"We're on our way," said the Admiral heavily.

Depending on where you were to see the affair, the seizing of Venus was either a trivial or a Jovian episode. From space, for example, all there was to see was the bulk of the lineship slipping its length into the clouds above the dawnstar and vanishing from sight. But from the city of Astarte, principal freight port of the planet, it was vastly impressive.

Above the towers and loading-peaks of the yards there appeared the most giagntic of all the space-ships in the universe, covering the town like a roof over its roofs.

There were a couple of smoke-bombs dropped into the streets and a few old-fashioned radios exploded under the power of the monster ship's sending tubes that announced that the city was taken and would be hostage for the rest of the planet's good behavior. Landing parties went down by lighter ships to establish order and arrange several necktie parties in which the Colonial Governor had the stellar role, minor parts being taken by his subordinates and

clerks. Venusian natives were warned off the streets; henceforth none but the Earthborn could show their faces by daylight. Plans were announced to transport the verminous natives to the Darkside District. All this took exactly six hours, Earth time.

A BRIEF resume of the life of Alexander Hertford III, Captain of the Fleet and Commander of Patrol Wing Twenty-Three would include many revealing facts relative to the situation of the moment.

As he lay comfortably sprawled on a divan aboard his lineship **Excalibur**, a capital fighting vessel of standard offensive and defensive equipment, he was a fine figure of a man in his uniform of purple and gold. The collar was open, which, with his tumbled curls hanging over his brow in the manner of an ancient Irish **glib**, gave him a dashing, devil-may-care expression. At least Miss Beverly deWinder thought so, for she was smoothing those tumbled curls and smiling maternally.

Leaving the commander's ship — which was stationed off Rigel—for a moment, we take a brief survey of his career. He was thirty years old, and his grandfather, the first of his name, was also in the Navy. His father was not as bright as his grandfather, but appointments were easily got from the sentimental All Earth Exec, which wished to breed a race of fighting men, true, loyal and hard as nails. Alexander Hertford II just got through Prep Wing and Training Wing by the skin of his teeth, lived on a lineship and died at his post quelling an uprising among the outer planets of Alpha Centauri.

The third of the name was definitely dull. However, by the virtue of the anonymous genius who invented the Autocram and peddled them to students, he got through with what could easily be mistaken for flying colors, won his commission, saw service and was promoted to a Wing Command.

Life in Prep Wing and Training Wing was Spartan in the extreme. Tradition was extensively cultivated; for example it was legitimate to steal anything edible and criminal to steal anything drinkable. Another of the blunders of the career-moulding branch of the Navy was the policy of rigidly excluding females from the lives of the boys and men for the duration of the course. Thus it was no more than natural that after graduating they got their romance in heavy doses.

The end-product of this was sprawling off Rigel when a discreet tapping sounded on the door of the Commander's lounge.

"I'll see, sweetie," said Miss deWinder, who was a good-hearted girl. She took the slip of paper that poked through the slot and carried it to Alexander Hertford III.

He opened it and read.

"Damn," said Alexander Hertford III.

"Wassa matta, sweetie pie? Did bad ol' Admiral sen' sweetie pie away f'om li'l Bevvie-wevvie?"

Sweetie pie opened a closet whose inner face was a mirror and adjusted his collar and hair. As he cocked his cap at the right fraction of an angle he said: "Nothing to worry about. You just sit tight. I may not be back for a few days—we're seeing action again." He re-read the slip of paper.

"Damn," he marvelled again. "When we used to talk about it around the mess-tables I never thought it'd come in my time. But here it is. Beverly, sweet, the Navy's taking over. Your lover-boy isn't a flying policeman anymore." He buckled on his belt and opened the lap of the handgun holster. There was a look of strain on his dumb handsome face. "From now on," he said, "your lover-boy is ruler, and no questions asked, over Cosmic Sector Twenty-Three, with full power of life and death."

Miss deWinder echoed after him, fascinated: "And no questions asked . . ."

THE decode clerk at Intelligence

Wing read off the message he had just received and set into English. Working like an automaton he was grasping its meaning for the first time, though it had been a full quarter-hour's labor to untangle the quadruply alternating cipher. He read; he understood at last; he whistled a long, slow whistle of amazement.

In agitated tones he snapped at an office girl: "This is for Barty and nobody else. Give it to him and run, because there's going to be an explosion."

He reread the slip of paper: "—hereby notified that the Headquarters Wing has . . ." He folded and sealed the slip.

The office girl stood back a few yards to watch the Commander's face. Alternately it registered disgust and amazement as he read and reread the slip. "Scat!" he finally choked at her, with an imperious gesture.

Alone in his office with Babe Mac-

Neice he shoved the slip across his desk, his face working.

She read it and looked up, frankly puzzled. "So what?" Babe demanded, "It's a general order, memo—whatever you want to call it. Why the skillful simulation of epilepsy?"

"You don't know," he groaned, burying his head in his hands. "Women, children, imbeciles and men who haven't passed through the Prep and Training Wings. I'd be just like them if I hadn't had the spy kink from birth and been through the Training Section of the Wing I now command. You don't know, Babe, what your typical Navy officer is like.

"Once for an experiment they tried sending some Rigelians—who are very much like genus homo except that they haven't any internal organs—all highly organized custard inside—to Training. Would those long-headed beauties let them stay? Nope—tradition. It was a school for gentlemen, scholars—by virtue of the Autocram and Terrestrials exclusively. Things are so bad now that you have to be direct descendant of a previous student before they admit you. All Earth Exec—blah! Democratic, but soft-headed and sentimental.

"When these prize beauties get into power they'll make such a hash of our beautiful colonial system—!" He was nearly weeping.

Babe MacNeice rose from her chair with gleaming eyes. "Well," she yelled at the man, "don't just sit there! What are you going to do about it?" He looked up. "Yes," she snapped. "I said do. Here you are sitting pretty with a corner on all the brains in the Navy, with the most loyal staff of any commander and you just snivel about what those

imbeciles plan for the future. If you feel so damn broken-up about it why don't you stop them?"

Bartok was looking at her with amazed eyes. Women, he decided, were wonderful. No false sentiment about them; something about their ugly biological job must make them innately fact-facers. Of course some man would have to find them the facts to face, but neither sex was perfect.

"Babe," he said wonderingly, "I believe you have it." He sprang to his feet. "Fitzjames," he barked, "and the rest of his crew are going to curse the days they were born when I'm through with them. Now let's get down to brass tacks, kid. I have under me about three thousand first-class Intelligence men, one thousand women. My office staff is four hundred. Lab resources—all my men have private labs; for big-scale work we borrow equipment from the University. Armament, every first-class operative owns a hand-gun and shells. Most of them carry illegal personal electric stunners. Rolling stock—two thousand very good one-man ships that can make it from here to Orion without refueling and about five hundred larger ships of various sizes. All ships unarmed. Servicing for the ships is in the hands of the local civilian authorities wherever we land. Good thing that we take fuel like civilian and private ships. Oh yes—our personnel is scattered pretty widely through the cosmos. But we can call them in any time by the best conference-model communications hookup in space. And that's that."

"It sounds good, Barty," said the girl. "It sounds very good to me. How about the rest of them?"

The Wing Commander looked very sick suddenly. "Them," he brooded. "Well, to our one division they have twenty-six each with a flagship of the line. They have twenty-six bases—including graving-docks, repair-ships, maintenance crews, fuel, ammunition and what-have-you—and innumerable smaller ships and boats.

"And, Babe, they have one thing we haven't got at all. Each and every ship in the numbered patrol wings of the Navy mounts at least one gun. The lineships, of which there are eighty-two, mount as many as a hundred quick-fire repeaters and twenty loading ordnance pieces, each of which could blow a minor planet to hell and gone. They have guns and we have minds."

The girl rested her chin in her hands. "Brainpower versus fire-power," she brooded. "Winner take all."

### CHAPTER III

**T**HE first clash came two weeks later off Rigel. Alexander Hertford III, Commander of Patrol Wing Twenty-Three, was apprised of the startling facts as he awoke from a night (theoretically) of revelry with Miss deWinder.

Rubbing the sleep from his baby-blue eyes, he yawned. "Impossible. There aren't any capital ships other than those in the navy. There's some silly mistake. You must have decoded it all wrong."

"Impossible, commander," said the orderly respectfully. "And it wasn't sent wrong either. They repeated several times."

The commander stared at the slip which bore the incredible message from Cruiser DM 2. "As regard orders to pacify star-cluster eight, your district, impossible to procede. Un-

recognizable lineship heavily armed warned us away. When asked for section and command they replied 'Section One, Command of Reason' Instruct. The Commanding Officer, DM 2."

With one of those steel-spring decisions for which the Navy personnel is famous, he abruptly ordered: "My compliments to what's his name, the pilot and navigator. We're going to relieve DM 2 and see what those asses think they've found."

In just the time he took to dress and bid Miss deWinder a cheery though strained good morning, the ship was hauling alongside the cruiser. After an exchange of salutations, the commanding officer of the cruiser, frankly angry, yelled at Hertford (over the communications system): "Use your own damned eyes, commander. You can't miss the damned thing—biggest damned ship I ever saw in my damned life!"

"Captain," said the commander, "you're over-wrought. Lie down and we'll look about." He was on what they called the bridge, a vast arc of a room which opened, for effect on the very hull of the ship. Vast, sweepingly curved plates of lucostruc opened on the deeps of space, though scanner discs would have been structurally sounder.

Taking an angry turn about the bridge he snapped at the lookout: "Have you found that lunatic's chimeras yet?" For, be it known, there is no such thing as blundering on a spaceship. You have to do some very involved calculating to blunder on a sun, and even so luck must be on your side. In short, unless this mythical lineship chose to show itself there wasn't one chance in a thousand thousand of its being located.

"Can't see any chimera, commander," said the lookout, one straining eye glued to a telescope. "But right there's the biggest, meanest fighting ship I've ever struck eyes to." He yielded to the commander, who stared incredulously through the 'scope.

By God, it was there. By all the twelve planets, so it was. The thing was bigger than the **Excalibur**, Hertford's ship. It floated very far away and could be spotted only by the superb display of illumination they'd put on, with taunting intent, it seemed to the commander.

"Battle stations!" he yelled immediately. "Ready full fire-power."

The lookout spoke into a mike and stood by.

"GET in touch with him," snapped the commander. "When you get his wavelength give me the speaker. I'll talk to him direct, whoever he is." Through his mind were running confused visions of the glorious old days of piracy, when his grandfather had so nobly fought in a ship a tenth the size of his own, to crush the mighty federation of the gentlemen of fortune. "And," he said aloud, "by God they did it."

The entire ship was buzzing confusedly with rumor. Each and every one of the crew of a thousand and the marines who numbered half had his own private theory half an hour after the strange lineship had been sighted. These ranged from the improbably accurate notion that it was a rebel against the navy who was going to raise some hell, to the equally absurd notion that the commander himself was the rebel and that the Admiral had sent his best ship to punish him. The truth, of

course, was too obvious to be guessed by anybody.

As the ship was readied for battle it seemed to draw in on itself, like a crouching tiger. Its skin seemed to be too small for it. Men stood as if rooted to the metal floor-plates, but they quivered in tune with the accumulating mass-energy of the drivers.

A fighting ship is built around its guns, therefore a word about these may not be out of place. The **Excalibur** had the most modern of armaments. From every imaginable spot in its hide there could extrude the spaceship equivalent of old sea-going "murder guns." Disgusted gunners gave that name to the little quick-firers with which they picked off floating men and boats.

The **Excalibur's** "murder guns" were about a yard long with a caliber of three inches between the lands. They were loaded with shells exploding on time; it would be murder indeed to leave a score or more of contact shells floating unexploded in space. The rate of fire from these little killers was adjusted from single-shot to ten a second and never a jam from the loading mechanism.

There were intermediate guns as well, but more for their own sake than for any practical use. The twelve-inch shells from these could blow a destroyer out of space, but who ever heard of a line-ship fighting a destroyer? However, if the occasion should arise, they were there, about twenty of them scattered throughout the ship, covering every second of curved surface.

Finally there were the Big Guns. These were the reason for building the **Excalibur** or anything like it. The rest of the ship was designed

to service those guns, store their ammunition, shelter the men who worked them, move them about in space, and protect them from harm. The Big Guns were really big, so there was no need for more than four of them. Two fore and two aft were sufficiently heavy armament for any ship. One of these four happened to be out of commission on Hertford's ship. That, he thought bitterly, would count heavily against him in the fight that was coming.

"AIM gun II, aft, said the commander. There had been no answer from the mocking fighting ship that had suicidally turned on every light it had. The thing was still in plain view. Hertford did not draw nearer or even move for fear he would be spotted. It was enough that he knew where his nameless foe was.

"Fire," said Hertford, "when ready."

From the magazine in the heart of the ship there slid along frictionless runways barrel-like capsules of propulsive burned compound, which consisted of big-moleculed acid and base which combined, in the presence of a catalyst, and released monstrous clouds of gas in the fraction of a second. Following the capsules there slid the Shell, approximately the size of a three-story suburban villa.

Loading machinery, that looked as though it could be utilized in off moments to build universes, fitted the shell into the breech and rammed it home, shoved after it the burner compound that would shoot it on its way.

And all this while, in the quarter of the ship devoted to fire-control, two hundred men had been sighting, resighting, calculating and recalculat-

ing at batteries of machines to whom the integraph was as the amoeba is to the mastodon.

The point is this: that shell couldn't possibly miss, because to avoid it the colossal bulk of the nameless enemy would have to begin moving only a second after the order to fire when ready had been delivered. It was violating every rule of warfare, and, the fire-control men were confident, it would not survive the error.

The gun finally moved on delicately jeweled bearings. This was going to be the most direct hit of all time. Cubic yards of metal locked it in position.

Metallically, over the loudspeaker: "Ready to fire, commander."

The commander: "Then fire!"

There are no words to describe the discharge of a Big Gun and the progress of a Shell through space towards a goal. But that mile-long battlewagon was rocked like a sapling in a hurricane. When the initial shock was over the reeling commander clung to a stanchion and glued his eyes to the telescope fixed on the nameless enemy.

It still glowed with lights; it still seemed to be a shade bigger than the Excalibur. The feelings of the commander, subtly schooled to brutality and murder, were mostly of exultation as he saw the Shell enter the field of the telescope. Now, he thought, they would be frantically dashing about as it drew nearer and desperately trying and trying to move a mass that could not be moved in less time than it would take the Shell to contact it and explode.

Two seconds . . . one second . . . half quarter—eighth—

"What the hell?" asked the com-

mander with a childish hurt air. He scratched his head, and as he scratched it his lineship, the **Excalibur**, disintegrated in a tangled, pulverized hell of metal, plastic, flesh, bone, Miss Beverly de-Winder, two hundred fire-control men, operating a crew of a thousand, half that number of marines and Commander Alexander Hertford III. They never knew what hit them, but it was their own Shell.

#### CHAPTER IV

**NEW METROPOLE**, capital of Earth, and before the Navy took over, capital of the All Earth Union and Colonies, was being pacified. This is done by lighter-loads of marines and fighting sailors who descend from a lineship hanging ominously over the most highly populated portion of the city. The lineship itself does not descend because an uncalled bluff is worth more than a called one, and because the battlewagons can't land from the moment they are made to the moment they are scrapped except in graving docks, and the nearest to Earth was at Alpha Centauri.

Marines swarmed through the streets in the traditional manner of rightist revolutionaries. Should a face appear that hinted of Rigelian blood, or should a half-breed with the abnormally long hands and black teeth of a Betelgeusian pass the marines, there would be bloodshed and no questions asked. After a few hours of the reign of terror, the extraterrestrials crept into cellars and stayed there for the duration.

The All Earth Executive Committee was imprisoned pending trial; trial for what was never made clear. Communications sending sets were

declared provisionally illegal; anyone caught with one in working commission would suffer death. The only etheric voice that could be legally heard was the light, mocking one of Voss, personal secretary to Admiral Fitzjames, and that only from the powerful sender aboard the Admiral's ship **Stupendous**, floating grimly above the Bronx.

The receiving code set in the communications room of the little suite of offices once occupied by the Intelligence Wing was clicking like a mad thing, and never an answer came, for the Wing had moved out lock, stock and barrel. The message that kept repeating (Admiral Fitzjames had said: "Keep trying" two days ago) was: "Why don't you answer, Intelligence Wing? Bartok report immediately aboard **Stupendous** to show cause why you should not be removed from office and the Wing disbanded. Why don't you answer, Intelligence Wing? Bartok report—" et cetera.

A squad of marines would shortly break into the office and find nothing of interest to anybody.

But there were two people who seemed to be partly Rigelian from the greenish patches on their faces and their peculiar scalp-lines, shaped like tipsy S's. They were cowering in a cellar as many other Rigelians were doing during those lunatic days when the Navy had first taken over, but there was something purposeful and grim about their behavior that didn't fit the disguises.

Babe MacNeice was tinkering despondently with the central control panel of the conference-type communications system exclusive to the Intelligence Wing. The panel was a little thing, like a book in size and

shape, but its insides were so fearfully complicated that nothing short of an installations engineer could make anything of them. And the panel was definitely shot to hell.

She said as much, and burst into a flood of tears. Bartok, the other Rigelian, snarled softly and handed over a mussy handkerchief. "Take it easy," he snapped, his own nerves raw and quick with strain. "We're sitting pretty compared with the rest of the office staff."

The brave smile that always ended the weeping spells flashed out as she returned the handkerchief. "What now?" she demanded tremulously. "Now that we can't keep in touch with the rest of the men?"

"Now," he said slowly, "I don't know. But—" He snatched at her wrist and dragged her behind a pillar as the door of their cellar swung open and a streak of light shot through the gloom. The profile of a marine's cap showed against the light. Bartok raised his handgun, resting the long barrel across his left forearm, pioneer-sharpshooter style.

The door opened fully. The marine called: "Come on out or I'll shoot!" That was on general principles. It was surprising how many fell for the centuries-old dodge. Then when the hider came out the marines would have a little innocent fun with their handguns and depart for other cellars.

Babe sneezed. The marine started and Bartok shot him through the head. "Come on," he snapped in an undertone as he tore off the Rigelian wig. "Through the window, Babe, and try to forget you're a lady!"

THE hue and cry has been called the most shameful tradition of genus

homo; for generations it had been abandoned in favor of more civilized and efficient methods, such as teletype alarms and radio squad-cars. Now, in the taking-over by the Navy, the dishonorable tradition was revived as a further testimony that this taking-over was nothing short of barbarism once you sheared it of the nickelplate of the lineships and the gold braid dripping from officers' shoulders.

Behind the two fleeing people poured a ragged mob of marines and sailors, roaring inarticulate things about what they would do to the sneaking murderers when they caught them.

Luckily—in a way—an officer of the Navy popped from a doorway armed to the teeth and charging them to surrender. This they gladly did as he stood off the mob with his weapons.

They found themselves at last in a lighter, one of the small boats connected to the Stupendous. In an off-hand way, as the boat left the ground, the officer said: "I recognized you, you know."

"Really?" asked Babe, frozen-faced.

"Not you," he hastily explained. "But Commander Bartok—I've seen his picture. Did you know you were proscribed, Commander?"

"I assumed so," answered the commander dryly. The officer—an ensign—was very young and callow. The hard lines were growing about his mouth, though. When he could call this "pacification" without laughing out loud, thought Bartok, he'd be a real Navy man.

"How's everything going?" asked the commander. "Would you know how the campaign's progressing in other parts?"

The ensign, seemingly delighted to converse on equal terms with a Wing Commander, even though a proscribed one, drew nearer—or as much nearer as he could, in the windowless, tiny, completely enclosed compartment that was the load-space of the lighter, and grinned: "Some dashed mysterious things have been happening and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you johnnies in Intelligence were behind them."

He shifted uneasily beneath Bartok's steady, piercing stare. "You needn't look at me like that," he complained, "Even if it isn't true it's the official non-official news—if you understand me." He chuckled.

Bartok moved swiftly then, clutching the ensign by the throat and bringing an elbow into his midriff. The ensign, not wholly taken by surprise, apparently, drew his gun and fired.

**THEY** dragged his bloody body—he had been shot in the face, and it had run all over the enclosed space—from the lighter a few minutes later. Babe was having a hysterical attack and the ensign frantically signalled to the sailors who took in the boat to relieve him of her. The engineer of the little craft came from his cubbyhole in the bow and took her by the arm, led her away from the mess on the floor.

"Poor girl," said the ensign. "She must have loved him terribly."

To follow Babe MacNeice, after the first torrential outburst she was dry-eyed, but there was a catch in her voice when she spoke: "Where are you taking me?"

"To the O.D., lady, he'll route you."

The officer of the day decided that she was important enough to go directly to the Admiral.

In the super-sumptuous office of Fitzjames she thought at first that she was alone, but a snaky individual who had a knack of blending in with the furniture, as if he didn't want to be seen, coughed tentatively.

She eyed him up and down. "You," she said, "must be the Satanic Mr. Voss."

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "Indeed? How so?"

"It's no secret that you're the one who started the—the taking-over."

"I defy you to prove it," he snickered.

"You're a civilian. That's final and conclusive. There isn't one of these certifiable fatheads in uniform that'd have the guts to do what they've been all taking about for fifty years. You touched it off, and you see victory in your hands right this moment. Bartok is dead."

"No!" he spat. "Where?"

"Coming up here on a lighter. He rashly jumped the ensign who'd arrested us. He got his face blown off."

"So," grunted Voss. "The end of organized resistance to our program. How did he manage, by the way, to blow up our ships with their own ammunition, or whatever really happened?"

"I don't know the details," she replied wearily. "We used glorified lantern-slides to project the simulacrum of a lineship; we could do that with about fifty one-man craft. It's a kind of formation flying. We turned back your shells by magnetic fields. Normally you could dodge them, because you keep ready to move whenever you fire the big guns. But we dubbed in a dummy shell—like the lantern-slide lineship—and you'd see that shell and there wouldn't be a thought in your heads until you were blown up. But you're onto that trick now.

It only worked four times, I think. I was a lunatic to think that you could fight guns with brainwork and hope to win."

She collapsed limply into a chair and stared dully at the floor. "Bartok's dead. The communication system's wrecked. You can have your taking-over, Mr. Voss; we're licked."

## CHAPTER V

"HELL!" said the Admiral. "Why can't I go out into the street if I want to?"

"Because," said Voss patiently, "you'd be shot down like a dog. You are going to speak from behind cover, and I'll post the best shots in the Navy all over just in case."

"Right," said the Admiral. "Then it's decided. I guess the old brain's clicking right along, eh?" He forced a laugh, and Voss responded with a meager smile.

Tapping on the door, Voss opened it on the young ensign who'd been boasting all over the ship of shooting down the insidious Bartok. He was being avoided by his friends now; he wouldn't let them get a word in about their own feats of clubbing and mayhem.

"What do you want?" thundered the Admiral. "I'm preparing my address to All Earth and Colonies!"

"Beg pardon, sir," said the ensign. "But I was wondering if I could be assigned to your guard of honor for the address. After all, sir, I did outwit Bartok."

"Since when," asked Voss coldly, "does outwitting consist of getting in a lucky shot?"

"Tut," grumbled the Admiral. "Let him have his way. Why not, Voss?"

"I was going to," said the secretary. "Report this evening."

"Thank you, sir. And—and—"

"Spit it out, kid. What do you want?" demanded Voss.

"About Miss MacNeice, sir. She seemed awfully broken up about what I did. How is she now?"

"Resting easy in Cell Eleven," said the Admiral. "Now go away."

"Thank you, sir," said the ensign, saluting as he closed the door.

"Good boy, that," said Voss. "It pays to have semi-fanatics like him in your train. They'll do the dirty work when nobody else will. Remember that, Fitzjames."

"I will, Voss," said the Admiral. "Now about this speech—"

The ensign was walking down one of the very long corridors of the ship, whistling cheerfully, oblivious to the superstition to the effect that it's the worst kind of luck to a ship; even worse than changing her name.

And in Cell Eleven—neat and comfortable, but a cell—Babe MacNeice was fiddling desperately with the communications control. Trust those bloody incompetents, she dryly thought, to leave a woman unsearched because a matron wasn't handy. . .

Then, by the most convenient of miracles, there was a little tone signal from the switchboard. "It works," she said in a hushed whisper. "It was bound to happen—nobody could try as hard as I've been trying and not get some kind of results."

She hissed into the tiny grid mouthpiece: "Hello—who's in?"

A male voice grumbled: "My God, woman, you've been long enough about it! I'm Casey, heading toward Spica because I can't think of any-

thing else to do. My fuel's low, too."

"Keep going," she said. "When you get there be prepared for anything at all. I'm not making promises, but there's a chance. And my God! What a chance! You get out now. I have some heavy coverage to do."

"Good luck, lady, whoever you are."

She smiled briefly and fiddled with the elaborate, but almost microscopically tiny, controls that directed the courses of the Intelligence Wing.

"Come in, anybody, in the Twenty-Third Cosmic Sector. Anybody at all. This is MacNeice—urgent!"

"Not the famous Babe herself?" came a woman's voice dryly. "I'm listening, dearie."

"You locate on Aldebaran III, sister, in no more than ten hours. Keep under cover. Now get out. Aldebaran III has to be covered."

With an anxious note the voice asked: "Just a minute—how's Barty? I heard a rumor—"

"Forget it, sister," snapped Babe. "You have a job to do." She cut the woman out and called in rapid succession as many of the thirty Cosmic Sectors as she could get. One set had fallen into the hands of the Navy, and that was bad, but she cut out before they could have traced it or even guessed what it was. There had been a confused murmur and a single distinct voice saying: "The damned thing's a radio, sir!" before she cut out.

What she had been doing was to locate operatives on the principal planets and stations of the Cosmos; operatives prepared for anything. It had been a job of routing; they bunched together when they weren't under orders. She had to break them

up—and she did.

After locating one stubborn female, she heard a man's tread in the corridor outside and as quickly as she could hid the little panel-like affair, which, considering where she was forced to hide it, was not a very speedy job of concealment.

THE entire city of New Metropole was jammed into the vast square of the Living Statues that evening for the ultimate proclamation from Admiral of the Fleet Fitzjames concerning the taking-over and the new order to be established. Though, of course, some historians would say that there was nothing new about it, but that it was a very old order indeed.

There had been erected against the superb backdrop of the living statues a greath booth-like affair from which the Admiral would make his speech, a speech to be heard simultaneously by every living human and colonial extraterrestrial alive. There was even declared a temporary amnesty on extraterrestrials; for this evening they might walk the streets—but only to and from the Square.

The booth was, of course, weapon-proof. Voss had been most particular about that.

Crowds had begun to assemble early in the afternoon; if there was to be a new order they would make sure that they would be its earliest and heartiest boosters. By dusk the press of people had grown so great that there was no room to turn around, let alone draw a weapon, so Fitzjames could have no fear on that score. The only free place was the platform of the booth, flush with the great transparent base on which the living statues moved on in their end-

less perfection.

When night had fallen they turned on the floodlights normally used to illuminate the statues, removing the color-wheels. The crowd was picked out in glaring detail by the pitiless glow. As far as the eye could see there was a meadow of faces upturned, each sharp and distinct by itself. The statues were in the dark, their sole remaining lights being turned on the booth. The very music had been subdued so that the amplifiers would lose no word of what the Admiral would say. It was a memorable occasion in many unsuspected ways.

Ten o'clock sharp enter the Admiral, dropping from the heavens in an ornate lighter which was then immediately dispatched. Fitzjames was afraid that his hour of triumph might end tragically should a spanner fall from the craft and crack his skull.

With him, of course, were Voss and the guard of honor.

Five past ten Voss stepped to the mike. "Friends," he said, "it is my proud duty to present to you the man who has liberated us from the yoke of the All Earth Exec—Fitzjames the First!"

There was an astounded hush from the audience, and then a protesting murmur. The wildest fancy they had indulged in hadn't included anything like a monarchy!

Fitzjames the First stepped to the mike as Voss bowed low. He said: "My loyal subjects, I greet you."

The guard of honor fidgeted. It had been a well-kept secret. The young ensign strolled over to Voss, who was surprised to feel a hand gun's muzzle pressed into his ribs.

"Excuse me?" he said strainedly. "Are you sure you're quite sane,

young man? Take that thing away."

"I'm not only sane," said the Ensign, "I'm Bartok. When that silly ass fired at me in the lighter he missed, of course. So I switched clothes in three minutes flat, Babe made up my face with the kit that every Intelligence Wing man carries, then we blew the face off the ensign of yours. He was unconscious. A pity."

"— magnificent demonstration of the reversion to childlike faith in the will of providence and the divine right of kinds—" the Admiral was droning.

Voss, a slender, slimy, active man, dived into the shadows as Bartok's attention wavered from him to the speaker.

The Wing Commander dived right after him. "Where are you?" he called into the darkness. "Don't be a damned fool!"

The only answer was a slug zipping past his ear.

"Bartok," hissed Voss from the blackness, "this is your last adventure. I can see you and you can't see me. Good-bye, Bartok."

**T**HERE was a sickening crunch from the blackness and a gasp that sounded like a tin can in labor.

"The poor, damned fool," said Bartok. One of the living statues had stepped on the man's head in the course of some intricate pas secul. Bartok had known it would happen, for the periodicity of the statues was limited to this: in the course of two minutes and forty seconds every square foot of the dancing platform was trodden on at least once by at least one of the two-ton feet of the statues.

Meanwhile the remainder of the guard of honor was vainly trying to

fire unloaded handguns—except one slender young man who simply grinned like a cat.

“Okay, Babe,” said Bartok to the slender young man. “You do it.”

“With pleasure!”

As the Admiral had just got around to the choosing of his palace-planet—nothing less than an entire planet would do for his regal estates—he too felt a gun in his ribs. He stopped short.

“Read this,” said the slender young man, who was trying to keep from giggling.

Without ado of any sort the Admiral placed the paper on the lectern before him and read in flat, colorless tones:

“I hereby declare that I personally had no such nonsense in mind. It was the work of my secretary. I hereby state that I assume no powers beyond my naval duties.

“General Order to All Officers: any seditious talk of taking over will be severely dealt with by the Intelligence Wing which is—ulp!—hereby consti-

tuted as supreme police authority over the Navy.

“Memorandum to Wing Commanders: you will turn over all insignia of your office to representatives of the Intelligence Wing who will make themselves known to you.”

In a very small voice he said: “That is all,” and deflated into a chair. There was a titanic roar of applause from the assembled peoples of New Metropole.

“Darling,” said Babe, “if the timing doesn’t come off right—if those people I contacted don’t show up to the Wing Commanders soon enough, before they recover—!”

“They will,” said Bartok. He laughed shortly, like the closing of a heavy lock.

“What’s funny?”

“They—they—had the guns and we didn’t have a thing but ourselves. Sweet, this is one stunt they’ll never try again.”

The crowd, still applauding, began to disperse into the night.

(Continued from Page 7)

## THE GOBLINS WILL GET YOU

me with startled glances, noses wagging.

“I said I raise you the earth and its people. I can do this. I think you will find it in the rules.”

The goblins consulted together while I kept my hand carefully concealed.

Finally they turned to me as one.

“We have decided that you are right. It is in the rules,” said the

tinest headed one and I heaved a concealed sigh of relief because I was almost dead sure it wasn’t.

“But how shall we cover this raise? continued the other and nodded to the opener.

I raised my eye cagily.

“Twenty billions in gold will do it,” I stated flatly and held on to my seat as the cellar rocked under the sudden impact of the arrival of twen-

ty billion dollars' worth of pure gold right out of several national mints and treasuries. I pictured the mess of books lying at the bottom of the terrific weight.

"Ummm," I ummed, considering my cards. "Will you see me?"

"I will see you," replied the opener

and I laid down my cards.

"Four kings," I said grandly. The world looked good.

"I have four aces," remarked the other nonchalantly and laid his own hand down.

You know what that means.

(Continued from Page 35)

## MECANICA

"THAT'S quite a story." The man called Jim Smith leaned back on the only tank where he sat and stretched his legs comfortably. "'Bout time I told you, since you must have come here to find out things. Well, it was only a coupla hundred years ago things got out of hand. The books say Man was on top of the world then. We'd got the whole planet under control, right from the weather in the upper atmosphere to the currents at the bottom of the ocean and gravity in the middle of the earth. We could travel to anywhere on the globe and talk to anyone else. We had super-machines to do all the dirty work for us. Nobody did a stroke of hard labor unless he felt like it, but we didn't let the grass grow under our feet. No, sir! We were a live race we made things and did things. There wasn't a damned thing under the sun we couldn't do."

"The twenty-fifth century, and all its glory," murmured Kellogg.

"You know it, eh? You been here. So you know the old books aren't lyin', as some fools say. Thank you, sir. Well, as I was sayin', things

were going fine and large for hundreds of years and folks thought that all dangers were over. Hell, were they wrong!

"We had thinking machines then. They did no end of cute things like men could never do for themselves in a lifetime. But they were harmless. Nobody ever thought they'd become dangerous — they'd have laughed at the idea. But then some criminal damned fool who should've known better made a living thinking machine. Yes sir. Living. God knows how he did it, what salts he put on his wires and in his cells to make a steel thing work like a human brain, but I know it was something ghastly. Some composition with human blood in it. And the damned thing became alive.

"Clever? My God, was it clever! It must have been. With its half-human feelings it got the idea of reproduction somehow and it got to work building others like itself. Not big ones like the original, you understand, but smaller, down to the size of a watch (yes, we still know what watches are, even if we are half savages). It got the things hitched

on to other machines, all kinds of 'em, so that they could operate quite intelligently by themselves. The thing became quite famous and influential by then, and it offered to run all machines on earth for the World Governments. Of course they didn't see through the idea and took the offer at face value.

"Somehow the Machine got some fool idea that it was a superior being, and that it was meant by its destiny to rule an empire of superior beings. Most of all it was mad to produce its own race of superior beings and rule them. So nearly every machine on earth had these little brains of all sizes and grades of capacity fitted to them and they began to think and work for themselves and get the same mad-crazy idea of their boss into their tin skulls. When he thought he was ready he gave the order. And the machines struck. Very cleanly they did it too. It was the first war on earth for ages and to do the job they dug up all the old fire-arms out of the museums and shot the human beings wholesale. Very accurately and economically too. The Machine didn't want human bodies and human substances going to waste. He needed them to keep all his other machines alive and working.

"You see, these think-tanks have to have human blood and nothing else to keep them alive, and for his empire the Machine would not only need millions of gallons but a permanent reservoir of it for the future of his race. It probably annoyed him to be so dependent on human beings, but there it was. Anyway, he meant to preserve them as we preserved cattle, and feed on us in the same way.

"HE was just a bit too quick and a bit too cocky when he started, though. He got all the Governments out of the way and disorganized the mass of the people, and thought he'd done the trick. He forgot about the armies which the Governments kept up for show purposes. These armies had not been to war for centuries, but when they realized what was happening all over the world and who was responsible for it they didn't stop to think. They went out on the war-path and bombed the Machine to bits. That may have stopped the worst, but there were still millions of machines left and they acted together like a body without a head—just thrashed and smashed around until there was hardly anything of the human race left. But some escaped. They got away into desert places under the earth to places where machines never went, and they survived and kept human intelligence alive on earth.

"So that was that, and here we are. We've survived, and we were too deeply civilized to go right back to barbarism, though we've had a tough struggle to keep going. The machines need us for their own existence, need our blood and body-chemicals, and they hunt us. We keep out of their way as much as we can. We managed to get our food well enough, we've got weapons of a sort and books. Sometimes we can get things out of the old cities the machines have abandoned. That's what we were doing when you found us. But it's hellish risky work. We're scattered and disorganized, and we're still so plentiful and prolific the machines can hunt us and shoot us wholesale, and that keeps us disorganized. But our time will come. The machines don't seem to

care how much they slaughter each other.

"Every other year or so they go to war with each other, town against town, city against city. Usually over

hunting rights. There's a new war on now, and from what this here gentleman tells me you've all been through the front line. This desert has been debated land for years.

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## THE BRAIN CONSCRIPTION

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(Continued from Page 51)

"We did it . . ." he said weakly. Carmine turned from the scene of devastation, stared at him blankly.

"But how? Why didn't we die with the Jovians in the tunnel?"

"We were in the hole I dug," Howard said. "I held the disintegrator over our heads—the gases couldn't get together to explode."

"But what started the explosion!" she breathed.

"I busted the bottle of milk," Howard said. "Milk's mostly water. There were streaks of sodium in the wall. Water and sodium heat up pretty quick . . ."

Then the girl was suddenly in his arms sobbing like a frightened child. Howard held her tightly, her brown hair against his cheek.

"But it's all over now," he said though he could hardly believe it himself. "Your father's hopes came true. And it was really he that destroyed the machine . . ."

He heard a humming sound coming up the mountain and looking up saw a truck racing toward them at full speed. It screeched up and stopped in a cloud of dust. It was the milk truck in which they'd been smuggled to the mountain. The farmer jumped out and ran toward them. Several

other men climbed out and Howard saw other cars roaring up the road.

"Shore was a pretty sight!" the farmer yelled, grabbing Howard's hand, "I saw it frum th' radio station." The other men came over and as other cars pulled up a sizeable crowd gathered around Howard and the girl. "We started broadcastin' when we heard th' explosion," said the farmer. "Everybody started akillin' Jovies - an' it wuz pretty easy after yuh blew up their li'l tin god."

"Then we might—" Howard cried. "We might be able to fight them off? After we get organized?"

"Well, I left afore they got started good," said the farmer, "but on the way up I noticed a powerful lot o' dead Jovies along th' road. Seems they don't even have sense enough t' dodge rocks since th' thought machine cut off."

Howard gazed at the man in awe. "And the brain extractions — did they—?"

"Not a man," said the farmer. "The extraction places were attacked first thing. You saved a million lives t'day, m'boy—and perhaps our world."

Howard's arm tightened around Carmine. "Our world," he said. She smiled and nodded.

(Continued from Page 58)

# BLIND FLIGHT

was hurtling away from the scene of the shooting. The dials registered the terrific explosion that must have taken place. The concussion had hurled the globe off its course.

Where there had been a gravitational force manifesting close by, now there was none. The pursuer was no more. It must have blown to smithereens when the shells struck it.

Sedgwick rapidly recalculated his course and shot on homewards towards the Earth. A number of photo-cells were blank on the explosion side, several rocket tubes were out of commission and other things connected with that side were awry. The sphere, however, was entirely under control and quite navigable.

Landing blind was not so hard as he had only to follow the radio beam. The radio had stopped functioning as soon as he had left the Earth as had been predicted and it had started again when the sphere successfully eased to within five miles of the surface. The great ball slid gently on its rockets into the field of its origin and came to rest.

When Sedgwick had crawled out through the exit tube and had shaken himself free from the stiffness of his muscles and the hands of the small crowd, he realized that it was night and the stars were shining down. That was what held his attention the longest, that and the great gobs of raw black flesh that had smeared over the sphere's side when the unseen pursuer exploded.

(Continued from Page 73)

# The Comet Is Coming

put into operation as no other plan of any other human being had ever been put into use.

In every home and workshop, on every wall and billboard, whether in New York or Kabul, great posters bearing the leonine face of Elbert Sanderson were hung to give the people inspiration and courage. Earth's greatest mind had found the way.

And in a room in Chicago six mathematicians wrangled and fought over the papers Dr. Sanderson had given the conference. Three said they checked, three said they couldn't follow them. Again and again each figure, each decimal point, each logarithm and factor was battled over.

And at his home Dr. Sanderson pored over the reports as they came

in and sat up late nights peering at the large and looming comet through his telescope. And every night Dr. Sanderson would stand on his head just before retiring.

**T**HE comet came closer and closer.

It loomed in the heavens like a great sword of shining white light. An ominous spectre trailing over the sky like the shadow of death itself in its awful shroud. A quarter of the sky, the half of the sky was occupied. Soon the dread day came when the comet loomed over all the expanse of the heavens and the day of crisis was at hand.

The treated bulbs poured forth their radiance over all the earth's atmosphere. Great auroras ranged below the comet's light. The people of Earth stood in the open waiting for the tail to move away, away from the face of the earth. To swing back into space.

Dr. Elbert Sanderson stood on the roof of his house and stared long and silently at the comet. Hour by hour he watched as the time wore on. Still the great tail hung in the heavens,

still the ominous glow hovered over the planet.

Then at last the time came. The time set for the impingement of the tail into the outer atmosphere. Sanderson snapped his watch shut. He looked up.

Then removing his hat and coat, he sat down. Bending over, he placed his head solidly on the ground, flattened his hands firmly and raised his body into the air. He stood then rigidly and silent on his head for five long minutes. Then he sprang to his feet and gave a loud cry. Replacing his hat and coat, he took out his watch, opened it, glanced at it, snapped it shut, and walked to the edge of the roof.

He jumped.

The comet's tail passed gradually into the atmosphere of the Earth. Billions of bulbs burned fiercely making the air around them hotter but otherwise influencing the atmosphere not at all.

The Earth had put its fate completely in the hands of Elbert Sanderson. And Sanderson was quite, utterly, insane. Had been for years.

**WATCH FOR**

**THE GOLDEN WEAPON**

by Zan Savage



**THE DEVIL'S HENCHMEN**

by Thomas P. Kelley



**LOUISIANA NIGHT**

by Denis Plimmer

**In Our Next Issue!**

# WHITHER CANADIAN FANTASY?

By DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

*A well-known American writer and editor discusses Canadian fantasy and science-fiction and the role of this country's authors to the literature.*

**W**HEN, during the course of correspondence with the editor of *Uncanny Tales*, it was proposed to me that I do a little article on the subject of Canadian fantasy, I idly assented and thought no more on it for a while. But little by little the subject worked its way back into my reflections and soon I was thinking rather deeply on the subject of what could be said about fantasy literature in Canada.

Just about the first thing that impressed itself upon me was that this was not as ersy a subject as at first I thought. I am not myself a Canadian and perhaps there might be existing realms of fantastic writing north of the United States border that had never come to my attention. I have been interested in fantasy for over fifteen years. It is both my work and my hobby and after further consideration I felt that if such an unknown mass of Canadian writing existed it must surely be so obscure as not to be worth considering for I am familiar with Canada and there are many Canadian enthusiasts who surely keep us in touch with developments.

It is rapidly becoming obvious that for the most part there is not, and never has been, any large amount of Canadian fantasy. Canada's imagina-

tive romancing was simply the same in general as that of the United States and in part that of England. In pulp magazines the many U. S. titles circulated throughout Canada as freely as in the country of their origin. Canadians read them, enjoyed them, and sometimes wrote for them with no consciousness of being different in any way from any of their more southern readers and writers. Thus in the field of pulp, Canadian fantasy actually did not exist - it was simply an undetectible segment of American pulp writing edited and directed primarily from New York City.

**I**N books it is true the British influence did penetrate somewhat better. Not much but nevertheless one imagines that British books of fantastic writing were more likely to be seen and appreciated by Canadians than they were likely to be known to the fantasy reader living otherwise in the North American English speaking sphere.

It was not until the war cut off the importation of American pulp magazine that anything like a native magazine market appeared. Several new titles began to come out printed and written by Canadians. This magazine was one of them. Soon, however, quantities of American pulps reap-

peared using the expedient of being printed in Canada but containing the identical material of the U.S. originals. But still real Canadian titles managed to hold their heads above water and today, in spite of everything, Uncanny Tales is still the foremost and in fact, the only actual Canadian fantasy title.

Yet, it will be said, this does not constitute anything worthy of the distinctive title "Canadian fantasy." A good part of the material appearing in this magazine was written by Americans and the rest is not in any way distinguishable from U.S. fantasy writing. So what actually can be meant by Canadian fantasy?

**FIRST**, what is fantasy? Fantasy in literature is the painting of pictures or concepts or the use of ideas which differ from those of accepted reality. Fantasy is, generally speaking, divisible into two parts — weird and science-fictional. The weird fantasy deals with the use of the dark legendry of the past, the beyond-science, the supernatural, the unknown. Essentially weird fantasy tends to hark backwards, tends to deal with beliefs prevalent in more ancient days—legends of vampires, ghosts, ghouls, and so forth. It is true that there is a recently developed section which tends to deal with possible existing but unknown forces working outside the bounds of logical science. Yet, in a way, this type of fantasy too harks backward. It tends to negate the basis of our present civilization—which is that science is real, the world is real, and that nothing (whether known or unknown) is beyond the boundaries or borders of universal law (whether changing or unchanging).

Science-fiction is the branch of fantasy that uses the projected possibilities of scientific knowledge to imagine situations or pictures that might possibly some day or some where be. In essence it looks forward, to the future. This doesn't mean it need be optimistic or that weird fantasy need be tragic. I am speaking of the philosophic outlook unconsciously expressed in it.

Now what do I mean by Canadian? I am not talking mere geographic designation, I am thinking of cultural terms. I means having characteristics particular inhabitant of Canada, to the actualities and potentialities of Canada. Could there be a Canadian fantasy as honestly distinguishable from American, British, German or other types?

There certainly is a difference between American and British fantasy. Any enthusiast can spot a science-fiction story by an Englishman even when it appears in an American magazine. Locale alone is not the giveaway. There is a style, an approach and an attitude displayed that is typical of the country. Likewise a good example is the German science-fiction story. "Metropolis." "The Girl in the Moon," and "FP1 Doe Not Reply" are examples that come to mind that may be familiar since they were all made into motion pictures. The German science-fiction story reflects the German attitude towards details, people, machinery and society. It is unmistakable.

It is a sign of the differences that weird fantasy tends to be British and that science-fiction tends to be American. England has always been the home of the ghost story and even when Americans write that kind of story, as likely as not the locale

will be in England. On the other hand many Englishmen who delve into science-fiction tend to make their attitudes and sometimes locale United States. These are examples of the mastery of cultural outlook over writings.

**T**HE weird tale is essentially British because it reflects the social outlook of the Briton. He dwells in an old land replete with ruins and legends, he lives in a community which may date back more than a thousand years and in which tradition and ceremony play a very large part. He is thus associated with the past intimately at all times and his thoughts when writing the imaginative story are more likely to stay within the pattern of past concepts than they are likely to stray into wholly new patterns of a pioneer nature.

In the United States the writer is surrounded with new cities and a new land. A land without ruins, whose traditions often run back no more than one or two generations and whose whole tenor has always been shift and change for the better. The same is identically true to Canada. Thus it is no wonder that the American in fantasy looks to the changing worlds of the future, to the raw new frontiers of outer space and the borders of science. He himself dwells in what was only a short time ago a very actual border, a real frontier of outer civilization.

But Canada is still a frontier while the United States has not been one for fifty years. Canada is larger than the states yet it is only along its southernmost strip that there exists a belt of cities, factories, farm and

civilization. Canada remains a vast frontier waiting for its future without a past.

The British influence is strong in Canada, a country which has never completely severed ties with its parent across the seas. Thus it was to be expected that when *Uncanny Tales* first appeared it contained only weird stories, ghost stories of the grim past and more often than not set in the ancient lands of the old world. That was the British influence on fantasy—the weird yarn. But it is significant that as *Uncanny Tales* grew and gained readers its type of fiction steadily changed. Fantasy of the ghost story type lost ground and science-fiction of the American type gained. The Canadian reader simply wouldn't stand a complete diet of the weird, he wanted, demanded, and began to get future-trended fantasy. Canadians do not live in an ancient and crumbly land, they live in a frontier land, a new land.

**I SAID** at the start that so far Canada has not produced its own fantasy. It has shown its directives: it leans away from the ghost tale though the British influence on Canada does keep up some interest. It leans forward to the future type of visioning.

In America we have science-fiction which is coming to deal very heavily with social attitudes of the days to come and with the developments of the worlds of space. Only rarely today do we encounter the first rocket to the moon tale. That is past. In science-fiction the American writer is subconsciously reflecting his cultural environment which in the United States is a land whose frontiers have

finally been eliminated and which is at work trying to shape itself for the centuries to come. The U.S. has successfully conquered its resources, its mountains and its mileage; the entire country is colonized and the problem which remains is that of utilizing it for the most effective benefit of the most inhabitants. That is why American science fiction has come to deal not so much with inventions but with social considerations.

Canada is different. Canadians may

appreciate the modern American science-fiction story but it is not exactly that which speaks for the Canadian. The situations are different.

Canada, as I have said, has no past, it has only a future. Canada has not been completely conquered and colonized as the United States has. Only her southern fringe is inhabited as befits a nation. Her vast resources of the northern regions are almost untouched. Where are the great cities of the North? Where are

## FEAR of SLEEP

Let dark dream and crimson shadow  
 Weave strange tapestries, and though  
 After these unfold shall come  
 From a distant doom slow drumming;  
 Guard against this baleful reckoning,  
 Credit not its eldritch beckoning . . . .  
 I must seal my soul inside me  
 Soundly, and no house can hide me.  
 Clutching out with taloned fingers  
 Nameless, deathless rancor lingers;  
 Thinly veiled beyond my dreaming,  
 Inward seeps titanic screaming  
 Whilst I stop my inward ears . . . .  
 Knowledge maddens he who hears!

—Emil Petaja.

the railroads running to the very arctic regions? Where are motor highways that make available the wealth of land around Great Slave Lake? They do not exist. They are in the future.

Does any man doubt that they shall exist some day? Does any man believe that it is beyond the ability of man to develop these lands? That while we may fly to the moon and colonize Venus (which must be a thousand times more uninviting than Northern Canada) we shall never hold and use these territories.

No, the future is perfectly clear and all men know it. There can be no Canadian born and brought up in his land who cannot be aware that Canada's future is in the north. Certainly I cannot see how any man could escape that knowledge from the moment he became, as an infant, cognizant of his land. The Canadian north stands as one of the greatest areas of real promise for humanity today. After this war when we settle down to really take this planet in hand for humanity, Canada will first come into her greatness.

**WHAT** has this to do with Canadian science-fiction? Everything. Canadians should learn to express their dreams for the future in the terms of the actual future facing their land and their own selves and descendents. They cannot simply say

that their fantasy and imagination is the same as that of the United States and thus escape the challenge. To try to identify oneself as just a part of the United States literary world is false. It is not so however great the similarities. Canadians cannot turn their backs on the future which faces them. They must turn and grasp it and deal with it.

Canadian science-fiction thus must find itself. It must learn to create its own visions based upon its own to-morrows: it must think out in advance the features of its world during the next centuries. For the face of Canada will be changed a hundred-fold. And the fantasy of Canada cannot exist until it fulfills its duty which is to prophesy that future, to sing of it and to expound it.

There have been some slight examples of this but not many. It certainly should not be my job to tell Canadians what they should write. That is for them alone to discover. But Canadian fantasy when finally it finds itself will look to its own future, to Canada's tremendous potentialities and promises. Canada has a frontier, therefore sing of the triumphs that shall come when that frontier is crossed and conquered. Canadian writers must cease trying to imitate American or British writing, they must find themselves and use the visions which Canada itself supplies them.

**DON'T MISS IT!**

**The Riddle of Tanye**

A Novelette

by W. P. COCKROFT

In the next issue of **UNCANNY TALES**

# AROUND THE CAULDRON



FOR a long time it looked as though a *UT* quarterly would never reach the dummy stage, but we found ourselves unable to hold out in the face of your insistent demands. The editorial staff worked hard on the issue which you now are reading, and we sincerely hope the finished result of our work gives you as much pleasure as it did us to compile the material.

We believe the illustrations in this issue will satisfy the most discerning reader. In our opinion neither Bok, Morey, Hall or Dolgov need sign their illustrations; their distinctive style is introduction enough to readers of fantasy and science-fiction.

Whether you agree with Donald A. Wollheim completely or not, you'll have to agree that the remarks of this well known author and editor on Canadian fantasy (page 115) will raise a multitude of arguments among the fandom of this country. We'll be glad to hear what you think as will Mr. Wollheim.

In our next issue we bring you a brilliant array of fiction by your favorite authors. We believe "The Riddle of Tanye," by W. P. Cockerott to be one of the most unusual weird novelettes of the year. Robert W. Lowndes needs no introduction to readers of *Uncanny Tales* and we know you'll look forward to reading "The Unholy Glass" by this exceptionally fine author. If you have enjoyed reading "The Brain Conscriptio" by Zan Savage in this issue we need only tell you that "The Golden Weapon" is one of the finest stories we have ever read! Robert W. Murphy who is slated to appear with "The Land of Living Death" is a Canadian author. This is his first appearance in *UT*. We think you will like him. Thomas P. Kelley needs no introduction, of course. We can promise you that "The Devil's Henchmen" is one of Kelley's best efforts and something to look forward to. "The Last Viking" by Hugh Raymond makes enthralling reading. Don't miss it! "Plane Equator" by Stanley White-side tells of what would happen were this planet to be cut in half. It makes fascinating reading.

By now you must have gathered that we believe you have something to look forward to when you see the next regular issue of *Uncanny Tales* on your newsstand. True, it will be made up of only the regular ninety-six pages, but they'll be packed with the kind of reading worth waiting for. You can help make it ever better by writing to the Cauldron and letting us know what you think of the quarterly.—The Editor.

Dear Sir:

Oh—! The cover. Terrible!!! What was it? The female in the bottle reminded me of a pickled frog I once had. And the leering scientist! Frankenstein? Yes, or John Donnelly in person! The attempt, in a way, was good, but that's all it was, an attempt. Get someone who can imitate Frank R. Paul. Or better still, get Paul.

Dead Center . . . not so good.

Power . . . best in the issue.

No Place To Go . . . second.

What Sorghum Says . . . ugh!

The Cauldron is still very good. Just between you and me, the Man From Mars may have the right idea. His letters are certainly well written. Corney, perhaps, but maybe correct.

But Joe Stamp—wow! That guy certainly doesn't read many good science-fiction stories. Kelley the best? Bah! Fellow, I bet you'd change your mind if you were to read stories like Wombeyn's "Black Flame," or Bond's "Altimate Salient," or Friend's "Kid From Mars." Boy those are really stories! Sure, **UT** prints stories that I enjoy (and some that I don't enjoy), but certainly no author ever featured in this or any other new-born mag has equalled those babies. The "Kid From Mars" was really something like a Martian expedition. Or how about "The Blind Spot," a story that took two experienced authors over six years to write. And you say Kelley is the best as far as you're concerned. Then, Mr. Stamp, you are not concerned very much. Kelley? Phooooooy! A drop in the bucket! Say, Ed, how about getting the stories I mentioned and featuring them as reprints? Anyone that likes real science-fiction would give their eye-teeth to get hold of one of

these. Then **UT** would really hit the top.

I'll be expecting something really good from you next time.

Kenneth Stanley Freedy,  
60 Pinehurst Avenue,  
Ottawa, Ontario.

Dear Sir:

We have been fans of your magazine for over a year. **UT** seems to contain few stories to account for its title. Not that we mind science-fiction, but when we buy **Uncanny Tales** we expect to find uncanny literature.

If we wanted to read science-fiction we would buy a mag bearing a title referring to science and interplanetary material . . . there are such mags, you know.

Give us more of Denis Plimmer and Wollheim, with a little humor now and again such as Corwin.

Your July issue, excepting for Corwin's "What Sorghum Says," rates, according to the standards of the Man From Mars, one-half plum. Serials are not needed to keep a mag such as yours running.

Hoping that the mag in the near future will be uncanny.

Joe Thomas & Wolfgang Weiss,  
916 Oxford Ave., N.D.G.  
Montreal, Quebec.

**You wait and see . . . next issue we'll have a letter from someone complaining that there is too much weird and not enough science-fiction.**

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading your September issue, and may I say that it is the best so far. Of course cover artists Ainsworth and Leslie are tops, but do you think either of them could be bullied or bribed into drawing a spaceship for some cover in the none-

too-distant future? Then I suppose there are many fans like myself who would like to see covers tied up with one of the stories.

And now the stories: "After 12,000 Years" has been taking the leading role in the last several issues so there is no need to mention it: but among the others Hugh Raymond and Walter Davies tie for first place with the two delightful stories, "When Half-Worlds Meet" and "Interference."

Next on the list comes "Transitory Island" by Richard Wilson. Not an unusual story, but well up to the standards set by UT writers.

Last but not least comes Denis Plimmer's story, "The Unborn." Cecil Corwin's, "The Reversible Revolutions" I hardly knew where to place. It could be at the first of the list or at the last. I finally decided to group it by itself. You really have something in that man Corwin. Without him UT would not be the same.

**Around the Cauldron** is a lively feature, but why not change the title cut to something more suitable.

Your magazine has come a long way since it was first introduced in pocket size. Here's wishing you continued success and hoping that some day you will be rid of that Menace to Mankind, The Man From Mars.

W. H. Andrews, Jr.,  
General Delivery,  
Cochrane, Ontario.

Perhaps it's sentiment, but we like that Cauldron cut. It's been with us since the beginning.

Dear Sir:

Before I begin my comments on your mag I would like to reply to a few of the putrefyingly wonderful remarks that have been marring my

impeccable reputation.

After this barrage, dear Ed, you may rest easy. No more will follow in future letters.

Listen, Repulsive (and I do mean Frank Johns), if you want to match wits with me, let's go! But first I'll check mine at the door so we'll start out even.

By the way, thanks for sending me your picture. Now I know why some animals eat their young.

And John Grant Donnelly. So I'm a fugitive from a sardine can, am I? Well, let me tell you something: If I had a face like yours I'd let it come to a head and then have it lanced.

Well, I won't say anything more about you, John, because what one doesn't know won't hurt him . . . that should make you safe from practically everybody.

Seriously though, Ed, I think that if I buy your mag I have a right as a reader to let you know what I think about it. What name I may use isn't especially important, although if you think I am hurting any prudish, stick-in-the mud's feelings, by all means censor my missives.

But honestly, Ed, I mean no harm. I merely get the urge now and then to let a certain lad, name of J. H. Whyte, know that he is the kind of a guy that's holding up television.

Why doesn't he bore a hole in himself and let the sap run out?

And so to work.

The July issue of UT has improved a great deal, considering the "or else" conditions under which the authors and artists probably work.

The cover . . . the dear lady in the retort must be very warm . . . 1/2 plum.

"Dead Center" . . . plenty dead . . . 1 plum.

"Power" . . . I fell asleep after reading the title . . . I plum.

"After 12,000 Years" . . . Sorry —after that length of time anything would begin to smell . . . 2 plums

"What Sorghum Says" . . . fair . . . 1 plum.

"Around the Cauldron" . . . merely reading this gives me a feeling of superiority . . . ½ plum.

Inside illustrations . . . is there anything that I can do that will quell your enthusiasm over yourself? . . . 2 plums.

July issue as a whole . . . 1¼ plums.

Just one more thing.

Mr. K. S. Freedy, I certainly enjoyed your letter, as well as the lovely picture you sent. By the way, if anyone ever tells you that you're good looking, slug him!

I sincerely hope that our good neighbor from the USA, Harry Cowan, likes Canadian science-fiction. In his letter he mentions taking a back seat. He must realize that his face is a menace to oncoming motorists.

Oh yes—the editor.

There but for the grace of God, go I.

And so—tallyho till we meet again.

We included the above letter from the Man From Mars just to prove that this is really a free country.

Dear Sir:

I have read your mag for some time. Ever since it came out in its present form at least, and it's O.K.

I've never written to a mag before but from the way J.T. of Montreal runs you down, I don't think a pat on the back would hurt. That guy

seems to think it cost you money to have those letters written or should I take closer notice of the editor's note.

If he is wrong maybe I'll be in print next issue. Oh boy!

I buy UT because it has good stories which appeal to me. I think a bunch of people are slightly touched by yapping over who paints the best covers and who writes the best stories.

Anyway, if they kick you in the teeth, do they have to jam the pieces down your throat?

Ron Bessey,  
Tillsonburg, Ont.

Thus far none of the pieces have stuck in our throat.

Dear Sir:

I've never sounded off before in the Cauldron, but there's a first time for everything and I'm fed up with seeing every pip-squeek with nothing on his mind pop-off about it.

In the first place what does the average customer want? I think I'm an average customer and when I buy a magazine I don't expect, and very rarely find one, that is one hundred per cent perfect. If a few stories are really good and the rest just so-so I think I've received a good buy. And that goes for any magazine I pick up!

Regarding UT. Most of the stories are above par and that's saying a lot. True, sometimes the illustrations are not all they should be, but the main point is that over the months there has been a steady improvement in this direction. That counts for a lot as does the fact that the editor seems to follow a policy of trying to please the readers. Certainly a large number of the improvements made since UT first was published in pock-

et-size can be traced to suggestions made by readers. My point is this: it's all right to belabor the editor for what he doesn't do, but at the same time why not give him credit for what he has accomplished?

I notice also that a good deal of the criticism that creeps into the **Cauldron** is not backed up by any constructive suggestions. It also seems to me that the **Cauldron** is in danger of becoming a clearing house for crackpots. Who has ever read more inane rubbish than that from the pen of the mentally deficient **Man from Mars**? His sense of humor, if it can be termed such, is in the same class with the punsters who trip old men crossing the road. If he has something to say that is worthwhile, by all means let him express himself, but until then someone ought to stuff a few plums down his throat with the hope that it will teach him good manners. His education seems to have been sadly neglected in that direction.

The few really good letters from readers who really want to help **UT** become a better magazine are lost among the childish scribblings of the so-called "experts" on fantasy and science-fiction. John Grant Donnelly and Gord Peck, for instance, always seem to have a lot to say, but after reading their letters one wonders why the editor wasted so much space. Donnelly, I'm sure, has just graduated from the short-pant stage and likes to feel that he is travelling in adult company. He'll write a more sincere letter embellished with the odd paragraph of horse-sense after someone has explained the facts of life to him! Until then he should remember the adage about 'Children being seen. . .'

In the meantime please revise the

editorial policy of the **Cauldron** in such a way that no letters from creeps will creep in unless they have something to say. If they haven't, toss them in the wastebasket where they belong.

Bertha M. Tait,  
Hamilton, Ontario

**We hate to think how you will feel after reading the letter from the Man from Mars in this issue.**

Dear Sir:

I don't often write to a magazine editor, but I am so sick of that sawed-off plum, the **Man from Mars**, that I had to do something about it. I heartily agree with Frank Johns that the **M from M** is a jerk.

And please stop printing such corny stories as "What Sorghum Says" and "Power." The best story in the July issue was "No Place To Go." The cover was really corny and so were the interior illustrations.

I know this probably won't get farther than your editorial wastebasket, but so what!

A. G. Keys,  
R R 2  
West Hill, Ontario.

**Your feelings toward the Man from Mars evidently make you a member of an exclusive society.**

Dear Sir:

Sorry to hear that **Uncanny Tales** is going bi-monthly but I don't think anyone can complain when you give such excellent reasons. But now to get down to cases.

I always buy my copy of **Uncanny** from Eaton's magazine counter, where it is placed in a stall along with other mags in the pulp field, so that only the title is visible above

the magazine in front of it. Upon sighting the title I eagerly reach over the counter and lift my favourite Canadian mag out of the stall, and smack! I'm struck by that horrible claw cover. Well, I hastily pay the clerk my fifteen cents (very reasonable) and hustle home to give the latest issue of UT the once over.

When Ainsworth's first effort appeared on the March cover he was cheered. The applause was deserved as he painted a splendid cover for our magazine. The next month, however he gave us a machine-monster jacket that in no way compared with the first cover. But for the September ish he hits his all-time low by portraying a scene showing lobster-red hands, wearing Chanel Number Five on its nails poised over a cringing damsel in an abbreviated suit, set against a sour, apple-green background. However, take heart in the fact that his is not the worst. Just witness the May and November copies and you'll see what I mean. But I hope Ainsworth gets out of the rut and back to his former style as I think he is easily the best artist you have had yet.

Another thing! Why all the cover girls? Out of fifteen copies of your mag on my shelf, nine of them portray a poor maiden in some perilous predicament. And finally, give me one reason why the cover shouldn't illustrate one of the tales appearing in the mag?

Fans may have noticed that some of the stories published in UT are science-fiction. Surely this should give your artists a broader scope from which to choose their ideas for covers.

Having scanned the cover I turn the page to the table of contents and am pleased to see the names of three

of my favorite authors: Hugh Raymond, Denis Plimmer and Cecil Corwin. Good old Corwin, the man who dishes out the humor the fans crave.

Noting with distaste that the top of the contents page is still devoid of a cut I turn to page 80 to enjoy the number one letter department, and damn! if that silly spook isn't still floating over the tombstones of the deserted graveyard. The readers section is called "Around the Cauldron" so why the devil don't you scrap that spook you now have and have your artist draw a new illustration with a cauldron on it?

The letter section begins with a letter from Gord Peck. He's one of Canada's leading fans and it seems you begin the **Cauldron** every month with one of his letters. It's getting so I expect one every month for he always has good ideas and criticism to offer, both constructive and destructive. I hope his fan mag is a success and I hope he exposes the Man from Mars. He seems (the M from M) to be becoming very unpopular, to say the least. I'll add my plea to that of others and thus be placed on record as being against reprints.

I always enjoy reading the **Cauldron**, so may it get bigger and better. It is darn near perfect now and only needs a new illustration to make it so.

I'm certainly one who doesn't want to miss Wollheim's article. I hope that more are forthcoming. A good article or editorial is the spice of any magazine. Say . . . what about that, ed? Couldn't you, our editor, do an editorial every month? How about backing me up on this item, fellow fans? This is a suggestion, and suggestions don't fizz on publishers or editors unless they are supported by

the reading customers and that means you!

And now to the stories. First place is taken by Hugh Raymond's, "When Half-Worlds Meet." Second is author Corwin's story of the adventures of Lt. J. C. Battle, followed closely by "The Unborn." Next comes "Interference" and trailing last is "After 12,000 Years." For my part I'm glad this serial is finished. Coblenz is a good author but I don't think he was up to par with this one.

So ends this letter and summing up I find I have voted for the following:

1. Better covers—less lurid ones, although that isn't important. Fewer maidens in distress—and that is important. Covers illustrating stories of fantasy and science-fiction.
2. More of Raymond, Plimmer, Corwin and what's become of Kelley?
3. An illustration for the index page.
4. A new illustration for the Cauldron.
5. More letters—I love 'em!
6. No more reprints.
7. How about some articles?
8. And a monthly editorial?
9. Shorter serials. Two parts are enough.
10. Oh yes, more humor.

I see I haven't said anything regarding inside illustrations. They are still only fair, but they're getting better. Let's have less of Testrine and more of Bok, and how about some new blood in there, too?

Well, this about covers all. I hope you won't feel that this is too harsh to print, for I can see that I haven't handed you many bouquets.

Albert A. Betts,  
18 Wascana Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario.

**We aren't complaining, but regardless of what some of the fans think, there is usually a bee in any bouquet we receive.**

Dear Sir:

"After 12,000 Years" was such a good story that it prompted a letter of appreciation—something I've been intending to send for a long time. At last! Here is a story in which all the events follow logically, in which the apparent course of destiny is not miraculously altered by superhuman efforts on the part of the hero. This fact made the story stand out far above the usual run of blood-and-thunder tales that have been written in the last few years. More like it, please.

About the question of reprints. Please do not print any stories that have appeared in American magazines between 1939 and January, 1941, when they stopped coming into Canada. These are too recent. I would like to see reprints of stories published before or since this period, especially those written by E. E. Smith, Merritt, England, Farley, Coblenz, Cummings, Williamson, Weinbaum, Hamilton, Keller and Cambell Jr. But not any Verne or Wells. In order that some of these be reprinted I suggest that the bi-monthly be enlarged to 128 pages, selling for twenty-five cents.

Please get Cecil Corwin to write more about Ellil. "Thirteen O'Clock" and "Mr. Packer Goes To Hell" ranked with the funniest stories I have ever read. But his Lt. Battle series is not very good in comparison.

To date you have had only one science-fiction cover. Yet half the stories are science-fiction and in my opinion all should be. Therefore, at least every second cover should be

stf. Your best cover artist is Ainsworth, with Wilf Long next. But Ainsworth seems to have trouble with machinery as is evident on the April cover. So for your stf get a new man. Another feature I would like to see restored is the solid panel under the title. This improves the appearance of a cover fifty per cent.

All the other readers seem to be panning the Man from Mars. I rise to his defence. I have run across him before in American magazines, together with his plums and seeds, and I like his letters because they are amusing and enliven the letter department.

Like the M from M I have a system of rating stories, but mine is more scientific. I estimate the value of a story out of a possible twenty points. The average good story is worth fifteen points. "A Million Years In The Future," and "After 12,000 Years" both rated 17, the highest *Uncanny* has ever obtained. Having rated all the stories, I multiply the rating by the number of pages of the story, and then add these values for each story in the magazine. I divide the sum by the price; this gives the enjoyment value of the magazine as a whole in "enjoyment units." Then I calculate the number of enjoyment units it is possible for the magazine to possess (number of pages x 20 divided by the price.) For *Uncanny* this is one hundred and twenty-eight. The enjoyment value divided by 128 gives the percentage rating. *Uncanny* usually gets over 60 percent and this is a very high percentage indeed. But the number of enjoyment units in each issue is only average; the high percentage is accounted for by the small amount of advertising. Thus, in paying fifteen cents for 96 pages you are getting more for your money.

If any part of this letter should be published please print my address, as I would like correspondents.

Alastair Cameron,  
Ste. 21 Brussels Apts.,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Your method of computing enjoyment value is the most original we've heard about. Thanks for an interesting letter.**

Dear Sir:

I trade *Uncanny Tales* with several Americans for their mags and they seem to think rather highly of UT—at least they keep on swapping with me and that must mean something. One of my swapping friends says, however, that even the best of your covers are amateurish, a thought I heartily second. My vote goes to the March, 1942 cover and even that wasn't good.

I might be original and say I thought the "Soul-Eater" was very good. But I won't. However, I prefer it to the glaringly impossible situation found in the same author's last serial. I never finished it. I got to the part where they were firing arrows from ship to ship in space, and then I quit. No, I have no quarrel with weapons of aggression in ethereal warfare, in fact that part of it strikes a very practicable note, a relief from the rays, science fiction authors are prone to use in similar situations, though I would think such a highly scientific race would have some way to augment the crude bow-and-arrow principle, or at least have employed electro-magnetism to pull the bow. No, I have no bones to pick with that.

But what can one say about an author who so far ignores natural laws as to have spacemen open their

ship to space and shoot their missives directly out into it? The wonder is why in heck Kelley bothers to shelter his space travellers behind hulls and windows at all—merely because that's the conventional design for a spaceship? Is Kelley a robot? Doesn't he require oxygen to live as all mortals do? Ah no, you critics, "The Soul-Eater" was brilliant compared to that. I have a strong suspicion there was something Kelley's moma never done tol' him—and it's high time he found out.

On the other hand most of your readers seem to like "The Words Of Guru." This time I will be original and say that I emphatically did not. I've been reading fantasy, weird and science for about a decade and I think my opinion is worth something. It had no plot. If it was meant to be subtle it was a failure. Subtle stories are supposed to convey an idea by suggestion. One of the best writers of this type of yarn was Lovecraft. You'd have to look mighty deep in this to detect any such thing. Just what the author was trying to do—beside disgust the reader—I can't make out and I challenge any one else to explain it to me. Different? That's about all you can say for it, but the novelty is of the kind fantasy could do well without. I am not unmindful of the problems facing a magazine such as yours. We are a small dominion, very backward, literally speaking.

I also understand the attitude of some of fantasy's adherents in Canada who become annoyed by the almost entirely unjustified "praise club" that convenes regularly in the

Cauldron at the direct invitation of the editor. I hoped that a truly fine Canadian fantasy mag would emerge from the first few faltering issues but my hopes have not been realized. One cannot blame worthwhile Canadian authors for taking their spoon where the gravy is thickest, even though it does leave the native readers and editors in the lurch. Speaking as a reader there should be some kind of law passed to circumvent native authors from marketing their work elsewhere, though as a prospective writer I hope the government never takes my suggestion.

I should like to ask readers who have old science and weird fiction mags to get in touch with me. I may be able to swap.

Nils H. Frome,  
Box 3, Fraser Mills,  
British Columbia.

The point is that there are very few Canadian authors of weird science or fantasy who are able to market their material in the United States or Canada. We wish there wasn't a dearth, but the facts are there and they can't be ignored. Every manuscript, be it from an American or Canadian author, is read with care when it reaches this office. Rejections are returned with a genuine feeling of regret on the part of the editor. As far as the "praise Club" is concerned, we don't think any reader, unless he has a secret sorrow, can come to the conclusion that the fans who contribute to this department constitute a "praise club." A quick glance at the contents easily disproves this assertion.

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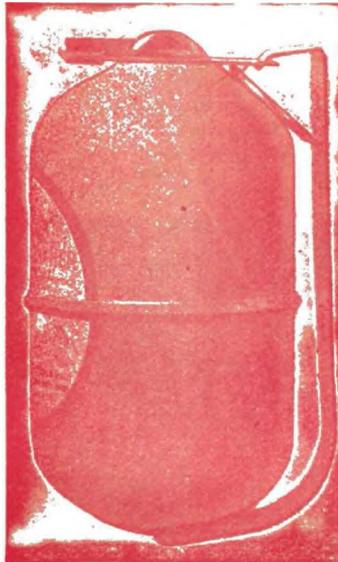
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