

# PLANET STORIES

20c

STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER WORLDS  
— THE UNIVERSE OF FUTURE CENTURIES

## GODDESS OF THE MOON

THE CRATERS SPEW A SLIMY GREEN ARMY  
BENT ON SMASHING THE MOON GODDESS  
AND HER EARTHMAN PROTECTOR.

by JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

## MARTIAN TERROR

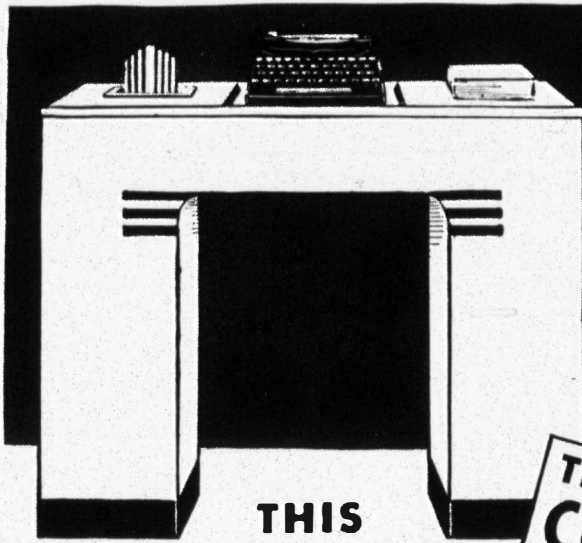
by ED EARL REPP

## THE GIRL FROM INFINITE SMALLNESS

by RAY CUMMINGS

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BY  
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# PLANET



## STORIES

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# GODDESS OF THE MOON

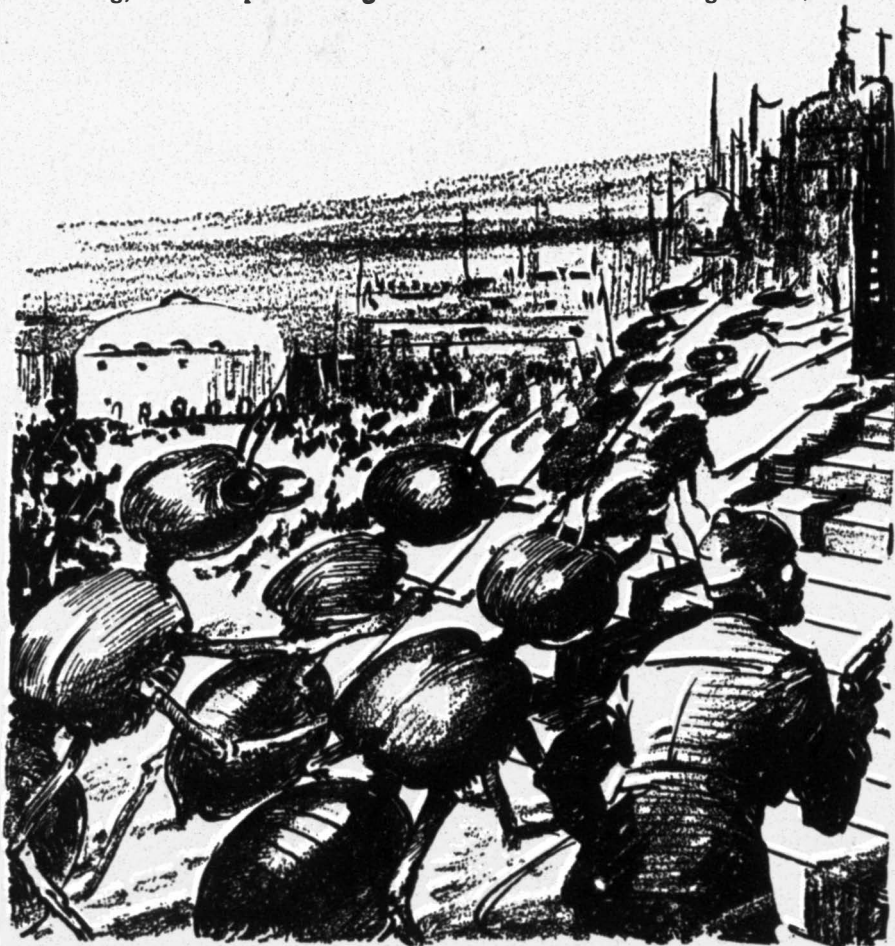
*A Complete Planet Novel*

By **JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS**

Death hid behind a smile in the white-and-gold city of Gral-Thala. Gibson, Earth-spy off the derelict strathoship, well knew his captive-fate. But if he died, then the Good Green planet perished from the Gray Death. . . . If he died, then died Diana, fair Goddess of the Moon.

**T**HE Tokyo-to-New York Stratholiner swept down toward the Manhattan Municipal Airport early on a winter evening, with the port-holes gleam-

ing all along the 300-foot length of her polished steel body. Rockets cut off well above the city in accordance with the strict American traffic regulations, she came





*In an instant the Plaza was in a wild turmoil. . . . The ripping crashes of the electronic guns rang out again and again. The murky flashes of Earthmen's death rays stabbed into the fray, and a clicking hords of Insect-men charged homo with spiked clubs swinging.*

down with half a dozen big props spinning under the drive of her powerful Diesel auxiliaries. A dozen whirling helicopters had been upthrust to take the strain. She came down to a city that lay murmurous and uneasy under the greatest threat that mankind had ever faced—the threat of the Gray Death!

A band was playing in the liner's saloon, and passengers in the smoking-room were hurriedly gulping down the last of their drinks. There was a forced and unnatural gaiety on board. Most of the passengers had taken more than a few drinks on the way across from Tokyo—for the news of the spread of the Gray Death was ominous. It is hard to retain peace of mind when a strange new epidemic rages unchecked from Alaska to Cape Horn and from Nova Zembla to New Zealand. Men and women were dying like flies, and all the medical science of this Twenty-fourth Century seemed helpless before the deadly plague.

It was the steady vibration of the Diesels that brought Larry Gibson back to an awareness of his surroundings. Their resonant hum was distinctly different from the pounding blast of the rockets, and any experienced stratho-pilot could tell the difference in a second. Larry tossed off the last of his drink and wiped his mouth with the back of an unsteady hand. Then he pushed back his chair and stood up, swaying as he tried to hold his balance on the slightly tilted floor of the descending liner. A man at the next table glanced curiously up at him.

"Guess we're landing, friend," he said. "Y'know, they say that there are a thousand deaths a day here in New York City now. They're digging graves in the cemeteries with electric shovels, I understand."

"Life," said Larry with alcoholic gravity, "is cheap. Too cheap. One hundred lives equals a man's career. It's all been worked out mathematically. Good evening."

Larry left the third-class bar where he had been sitting, and walked slowly along the corridor. Mechanically he turned the collar of his frayed coat up around his neck and pulled the brim of his wide hat well down over his eyes. There was always the possibility that someone would recognize him, and in these past months he

had learned to keep in the shadowy byways of life. The time would come when men would forget that an unlucky person named Larry Gibson had ever existed, but in this year 2332 there were still plenty of people who would recognize his face.

GIBSON was not traveling in the first-class section of the big liner, in those luxurious quarters built into the giant wings to which his rank had once given him free entry. Back in the days when he had been Chief Pilot of all the Strathofleet he could ride there as a matter of course. Now he could not afford it. He could not even afford the second-class accommodations amidships. Instead, he rode in the third-class quarters back in the tail. When a man knows that he has no possible chance of getting another job, he has to hoard the money he has saved up.

The giant airliner came down to an easy landing, and rolled across the field on her big wheels. The lights of the airport burned as brightly as ever, but anyone accustomed to New York could tell that there was something wrong. There were no crowds of spectators at all, and the few people who met the incoming travelers looked harassed and nervous. Even the airport attendants went about their business in a listless and somehow furtive manner.

It had been ten days ago that the blight first struck a peaceful World that believed it had at last made life safe and pleasant for its inhabitants. A few peasants in Honan province in China had taken convulsions and died while their skins turned a peculiar silver gray. Within twenty-four hours similar deaths were reported from points as widely separated as Bergen, Norway and Santos in Brazil.

Since then the strange new epidemic had raged unchecked. All the medical and financial resources of the Confederated Nations of Earth had been thrown into the fight without effect. The Gray Death struck quickly, men and women alike dying within six hours of the appearance of the first tell-tale patches of silver on their skin. The population had not yet started to panic, except in a few isolated instances, but the nerves of all men were ragged and jumpy from the strain.

Standing in the crowd of third-class pas-

sengers that had just alighted from the liner, Larry Gibson heard two of the airport attendants talking.

"He claims he's going to take that old rocket-ship to the Moon!" one of them said, and his companion chuckled.

"Crazy, all right."

"Guess he is. But what I'm wondering is how he got a crew to go along with him."

"Have you seen them? They're the damnedest bunch of derelicts I ever saw."

For a moment Larry was tempted to ask the attendant for the name of the vessel they were discussing. It sounded like the one place where a disgraced and black-listed officer might get a berth. Then he shrugged and turned away. Nothing mattered very much, any more.

## II

THE alighted passengers strayed slowly across toward the glass and chromium entrance to the Administration Building. The landing lights were cut off, and the airport became a deep pool of quiet shadow in the midst of the towering ramparts of New York's buildings. Most of the structures were two hundred stories high in this queenly city that had been built on the site of the old one destroyed in the final World War of 2132.

Then a woman began to scream. She was standing in the glow of light from the Administration Building, holding out a shaking hand that was already turning silver on the back. People hurriedly backed away from her. She was already in convulsions before the white-garbed attendants from the airport hospital could get her under shelter. A man swore tonelessly, and people kept far apart as they hurried from the field. The Gray Death had struck again!

Most of the passengers took elevators to the upper floors. There they boarded monorail trains that took them to the part of the city where they were bound. Or, if they happened to live near the airport, they simply went along one of the glass-enclosed cross-walks that clung to the outside of the buildings and bridged the streets in graceful curves. Larry Gibson did not go into the Administration Building at all. There would be too many people who might know

him, and he dreaded their sneering smiles of recognition. He went out a small gate at the side of the airport, a gate that led to the tenth-floor level.

The lower parts of New York's towering buildings formed the zone of factories and warehouses. There were few lights here at this hour, and the cross-walk was nearly deserted. Larry was looking for a cheap place to stay, to conserve his dwindling resources. It wasn't that Larry was particular about the kind of work that he was willing to do. That stage was far behind him! It was simply that, in this simple and highly organized civilization of the Twenty-fourth Century, a man couldn't get a job without showing his properly authenticated identity papers. And when a prospective employer saw his papers, it always turned out that there were no vacancies available. There was a hard bitterness in Larry Gibson's eyes as he trudged away from the airport.

After about half a block, Larry turned in at a little place called the Moorings Bar. It was dingy, and smelled of stale beer. Most of the customers were night-shift factory employees, waterfront loafers, and the crews of the water-borne ships that still crawled sluggishly across the ocean with those bulky and cheap commodities that the airliners did not care to handle. Half a dozen roughly clad men leaned on the greasy bar. Larry sat down at a corner table and called for a drink.

So he was back in New York—the city that had been his home before the Stratholiner *Pegasus* fell into the sea with a loss of a hundred lives two years before! Larry wondered how long he would stay here. Not long. A month, or perhaps six weeks. The latter would be a long time for him to remain in one place nowadays. He had become a wanderer. A rolling stone that gathered neither moss nor worldly goods, nor even much of the peace of mind that he sought. So he passed like a shadow from city to city and from land to land. He made no friends nowadays. Larry Gibson was still a young man, but there was a cold grimness about his face that did not encourage advances.

A RADIO behind the bar had been playing music, but now the sound abruptly ceased and the television screen

went blank. Then the face of a government announcer appeared on the screen. His voice came from the speaker sharp and clear.

"Though the toll of the Gray Death continues to be very heavy, the government of the Confederation is pleased to announce to the peoples of Earth that the mystery of the disease has been solved. It is found to be a new and malignant form of leprosy, caused by some hitherto unknown germ. It has also been found that the proper use of radium can control the disease, when applied by what doctors call the Riesland Method. That is the end of this bulletin."

The radio returned to playing music. The bald-headed bartender grinned broadly.

"Maybe we'll have a chance to go on living after all, boys," he said. "I guess that calls for a drink on the house."

"Aye—the mystery of the Gray Death is removed!" a deep voice behind Larry rumbled with heavy sarcasm. "I could have told them that answer a week ago, if I'd thought the thick-headed fools who run this planet would listen to me! But what they haven't announced is that the Riesland Method calls for a lot of radium, and all Earth's supply is not enough to check this epidemic in time to save the population of the planet!"

Larry turned around to glance at the speaker. It was a man who sat alone at a table by the wall. He was a very tall man, gaunt and gray-haired with a pointed beard that jutted forward at a pugnacious angle. Exceptionally heavy eyebrows gave him a quizzical appearance. His unpressed clothes were badly stained, and rakishly tilted on one side of his head was a slouch hat of a type that had gone out of style many years before. A half-empty bottle of rum stood on the table before him. Somehow he gave the impression of having already consumed what liquor was missing from the bottle, and of having every intention of emptying it before leaving his table.

Well, Larry Gibson reflected with a sardonic grin, he was no one to criticize a man for a little thing like excessive drinking. His own record in that regard had been pretty lurid for the past two years. Just then the other man grasped his bottle firmly in one hand, and his glass in the

other, and lurched over to Larry's table.

"Mind if I join you for a bit of conversation, young feller?" he boomed. "Rum, more than any other essence of Bacchus, is a friendly drink that needs to be shared."

Larry looked up at him without cordiality. He had been living alone with his bitterness and frustration for so long that he resented any intrusion on his privacy. Then he suddenly grinned. There was a reckless and irrational gallantry about this gaunt old man that appealed to some part of his own nature that had now been dormant for a long time.

"Sure, sit down," he said.

"Thanks, young feller. My name is Crispin Gillingwater Ripon, and I feel the need of a little company after a hard day trying to recondition a rocket ship with the jousiest collection of shiftless renegades that ever signed on as crew for such a craft."

"What ship is that?" Larry wanted to know.

"The *Sky Maid*."

"Never heard of her," Larry said thoughtfully and slowly.

"You wouldn't! She used to be the *Orion*, but she is now renamed and my ship—subject to a matter of a few liens and some faulty hull insulation and a very good chance of never coming back to port again after I start on my voyage. Have a drink, young feller!"

"The *Orion*!" Larry exclaimed. "Why, she was condemned as not air-worthy over a year ago!"

"How else do you think I bought her?" Ripon grinned. "I'll concede that, if the world had shown a proper appreciation for my varied talents, I'd be a millionaire many times over, but I happen to be almost broke. You appear to be a promising lad, young feller. How about signing on for a trip to the Moon?"

"So you're the crazy man who is talking of going to the Moon," Larry grinned. Ripon glowered at him from under his heavy brows for a minute, then grinned in return.

"Be more careful with your language, young feller, or I'll bust this bottle over your head! I may be eccentric, but I'm a lot saner than those pedants who claim the trip can't be made."



## III

RIPON was sprawled back at his ease, a smoldering pipe in one hand and his glass in the other. He was smiling at Larry's startled expression, but he seemed to be serious. Vague memories were stirring in Larry Gibson's mind, memories of things he had read and heard in the old days before he became a drifter whose main effort was to avoid thinking at all. Crispin Gillingwater Ripon! He had heard the name before, though it had been in connection with abstract science rather than with practical rocket-ship flying. Somehow, his memory of the name was connected with failure, with public derision, and with rumors of outright charlatanism.

"I think I've heard of you," he said cautiously.

"In that case you have heard no good!" Ripon said cheerfully. "I am at present the problem child of the scientific world. The horrible example! A laughing stock for seedy professors and callow students. Mention of my name produces hoarse guffaws of mirth in scientific circles at the moment, young feller, but it will be different when I return from my successful trip to the Moon. Better come along."

"Why are you going at this time?"

"Because there are radium salts on the Moon, I am convinced. This world hasn't treated me with much respect, young feller, but I've had a good time on it for my sixty-odd years and I'm fond of the old place. I want to make the trip and get back before the Gray Death wipes out our population—including myself!"

"But you can't take a rocket-ship to the Moon," Larry protested. "Professor Staunton's attempt proved that thirty years ago."

"All it proved was that neither Staunton nor his ship were ever heard of again," Ripon said calmly. "I knew Staunton well. He was a good man, a careful man—but he wasn't Crispin Gillingwater Ripon! I'm making some changes of my own in the *Sky Maid*; changes that should spell the difference between success and failure."

When he looked back at it later, Larry had only a hazy recollection of the rest of that evening. The rum got to him. The one thing that did stick in his mind was a snatch of song that he and Ripon

had sung over and over again, pounding their glasses on the table while the other men in the dingy little barroom stared at them in good-natured derision.

"There's only a few of us left,  
And we never were worth a damn,  
But I'll follow my vagrant star,  
That's the kind of a guy I am!  
(Drink it down!)  
That's the kind of a guy I am!"

LARRY GIBSON awoke the next morning to the sound of many hammers beating on a steel shell. There was also a sharp and comprehensive ache that started at the top of his head, which felt as though someone had been hitting him with the butt of a ray-gun, and spread all down through his body. He groaned and sat up.

He lay in a bunk, in a steel-walled cabin. Evidently the officers' quarters on some stratho-ship. Across the white painted ceiling, where flakes of red rust were showing through the dirty paint, the word CONDEMNED had been stenciled in black. Sitting upright on the edge of his bunk, Larry momentarily dropped his head in his hands. Then he stood up and left the cabin, grinding his teeth at the ceaseless pound of the hammers on the steel shell.

At intervals, as Larry went slowly down the corridor, he passed the word CONDEMNED stenciled on the walls and bulkheads. When the government inspectors decided that a rocket-ship was no longer safe for flights through the vast emptiness of the strathosphere, they made the fact very evident! He climbed a ladder to an open manhole, and emerged into the bright sunlight of a winter morning. For an instant he filled his smoke-tainted lungs with deep gulps of fresh air. Then he looked about him.

He stood atop the red-painted hull of a rocket-ship. It was an old V-39, a type that had been first built some thirty years before and was now obsolete. The weathered paint was badly rust streaked, and the worst spots had been touched up with bright red lead so that they looked like livid scars. The ship was lying in a corner of the airport, and a gang of men were busy at what appeared to be an attempt at general reconditioning. After one look Larry

didn't think it would do much good.

Turning forward along the top of the super-structure, Larry met a man in a faded blue uniform that bore the two stripes of a second officer. He was a lean, swarthy-faced man with a meticulously pointed mustache that contrasted strangely with his otherwise down-at-the-heels appearance.

"Morning," he said shortly. "I'm Colton, the second officer. Guess you're the new first mate."

"If so, it's news to me!" Larry said grimly. "Where's the madman that commands this decrepit craft?"

"You'll find the Old Man in the control room. And if you use your head, you won't speak slightly of the *Sky Maid* in his presence."

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it," Larry said. Colton's eyes blinked momentarily, but then he smiled and Larry immediately marked him down as a man to be watched. He didn't trust people who smiled when they were insulted.

"Suit yourself," Colton said as he turned away.

Crispin Gillingwater Ripon was bent over a set of strange diagrams spread out on the chart table in the control room. Thick smoke swirled from the short pipe clenched in his teeth. His face was deeply lined this morning, and there were wrinkled hollows under his eyes, but he looked up with a broad grin as Larry came into the dusty control room. His reckless eyes were bright and cheerful in spite of being blood-shot.

"CHEERIO, young feller!" he boomed. "How's the pride of the stratosphere this morning?"

"All right," Larry said shortly. "It seems that I owe you thanks for a night's lodging. But what's this about my being first mate of this hulk?"

"Accepting your unspoken apology for having maligned my ship," Ripon said severely, "the statement is correct. You signed on last night. I have your signature to prove it—although it's a bit shaky because I had to guide your hand which seemed unable to hold the pen."

"Do you know who I am?" Larry asked grimly.

"Do I know who you are?" Ripon's

lean, brown face suddenly crinkled into a smile. "Good Lord, young feller, you spent two hours last night telling me your life's history while you cried into your beer."

"Then I can't have told you the whole story." The hang-over, and the fact that he had not had any solid food in nearly twenty-four hours, were making Larry slightly dizzy. His voice rose in spite of himself. "I'm Larry Gibson, blacklisted in every airport in the world. 'Gibson the Murderer,' the newspapers called me. I'm the man who was master of the rocket-liner *Pegasus* when she fell into the South Pacific with a loss of a hundred lives. It wasn't really my fault, but the inspectors believed some fools who lied to save their own skins. Now, my friend, do you see why I can't sail on even your shaky old craft? I was drummed out of the service, and ever since . . ."

"And ever since you've been going around feeling sorry for yourself!" Ripon's voice cut sharply through the mists of Larry's bitterness. "Hell, young feller, I've been disgraced worse than that more than once. I just don't pay any attention to it. Forget it. I need a first officer on this trip, and I believe your story that the disaster wasn't your fault, and there's an end to it! You're coming along."

"But I haven't even a license any more."

"That doesn't matter. Governmental regulations don't apply to a trip to the Moon. They don't license a man for what they think is suicide, you know! Go ashore and get some breakfast to steady you down. Then, when you feel better, come back and I'll go over the details of the trip with you."

For a long moment Larry stared at Ripon. Then he began to laugh.

"By the Lord Harry, I think you're crazy!" he said. The gaunt scientist grinned back at him with complete good humor.

"Better people than you have called me that, young feller," he said cheerfully. "They've been expecting me to get myself killed for years. But Crispin Gillingwater Ripon is still alive and healthy—albeit somewhat battered. Follow my star and you'll have plenty of excitement, even though it may get you nothing more than a broken head."

## IV

WHEN Larry Gibson returned to the ancient and seedy-looking *Sky Maid* after a breakfast at a nearby restaurant, he paused to look at the work in progress outside her hull. It was like nothing that he had ever seen before. A network of interlacing wires was being bolted to the outside of the ship's cigar-shaped hull, so that they formed a sort of screen with the strands some two inches apart. Other men were busy at caulking rivets and re-packing insulation. This last was routine stuff in connection with any attempt to re-condition an old vessel for travel in the thin, chill regions of the strathosphere—but he was completely puzzled by the painstaking labor of fastening those criss-crossing wires in place.

He found Ripon still in the vessel's dusty control room. Much of the equipment had been ripped out when the ship was first condemned. The missing articles had been hastily replaced with second-hand equipment which was often of a slightly different pattern from the original, so that the whole room had a makeshift appearance. The lean scientist looked up from the clouds of blue and vile-smelling smoke that swirled upward from his pipe.

"Well, young feller!" he boomed in his deep voice that could easily carry above the dull roar of rocket motors. "How do you feel now? Ready to go to work?"

"Listen!" Larry said. He had intended to be sharp and sarcastic, but he was grinning in spite of himself. It was hard to stay angry with anyone as irresponsibly cheerful as Crispin Gillingwater Ripon. "Seriously! You couldn't take the best rocket-ship on Earth to the Moon, let alone this old derelict. Not if you want to come back alive. It's been proven that, by the time you reach the velocity of escape to get away from the Earth's attraction, you have a speed too great for our present knowledge of rocket-ship technique to brake in time to prevent disaster. . . ."

"How has that been proven?" Ripon interrupted, jerking the pipe from between his teeth and pointing the smoking stem at Larry as though it were the barrel of a ray-gun.

"Why—by the two attempts that have been made! You know the story. Two

hundred years ago, at the time we had the last war on Earth, that group of defeated outlaws stole the giant transport *Mercury* and started for the Moon and vanished. Then, it was only thirty years ago that Professor Lester Staunton made his attempt in the rocket cruiser *Orestes*, and he vanished."

"You're like all the 'rest," Ripon grumbled. "Always jumping to conclusions based on a few scraps of evidence. No man on Earth really knows how a rocket-ship would behave in interplanetary travel, because it hasn't yet been done. There is a great mass of unproven theories that are generally accepted as true—but those are not facts. It was once generally accepted that the Earth was flat. However—I have a new method of propulsion for this ship, by means of the amplification of magnetic currents, and I expect to supplement the rockets with that new equipment."

"I think you're crazy," Larry said, "but I'll go along with you anyway."

"Now you show the proper spirit, even if not good sense," Ripon said cheerfully.

It was after midnight that night before the *Sky Maid* was ready to go. The crew were at launching stations, and the ship's old-fashioned Diesels were rumbling as they were warmed up. Larry was standing under the dome of duralite glass that covered the upper observation platform when Colton came up to stand beside him.

"Well—we'll be off in a few minutes!" the swarthy second officer said.

"Wonder if we'll ever come back."

"Lord knows!" Colton shrugged, and his dark eyes were somber. "The police of half a dozen countries are looking for me anyway. I've had my fingers crossed the whole time we've been refitting this craft."

"Why tell me all this?" Larry asked. Colton shrugged again, and his smile was half a sneer.

"Your own reputation isn't much better, Gibson. I figure that if this trip works out it may give us both a chance to square ourselves, and if it doesn't we're not much worse off than we are now."

"You may have something there," Larry admitted.

Then Ripon shouted a command, and the helicopters started to spin. Only a handful of loafers watched the *Sky Maid* take off. A few waved. Others tapped

their heads derisively. Man's third attempt to navigate the 239,000 empty miles to the Moon had begun!

THE old ship's rickety helicopters and creaking Diesels could hardly lift her high enough to reach the level required by law before the rockets could be started. High clouds veiled the stars, but the many lights of New York were still visible below them when Ripon at last cut in the rocket motors. The *Sky Maid* shivered all along her length as their blasting roar began, and then she started to shoot upward at a steep angle. Her whole fabric creaked and groaned, and Larry Gibson shook his head dubiously. A few air-leaks would be all they would need to make their situation utterly hopeless.

The drive of the rockets carried them into the belt of clouds. For a few seconds the glass ports were veiled by gray mist. Then they were above the clouds and zooming upward in the cold light of the Moon. The crew were released from their launching stations as the ship settled down to a smooth routine, and Larry took over the watch. A minute later he was alone in the darkened control room with the dim glow of the varied instrument panels to keep him company. Already the air was starting to thin out, so he closed the ports and turned on the vessel's air-conditioning system. The atmosphere took on the faintly chemical odor characteristic of travel in a sealed ship in the high places.

From somewhere nearby Larry could hear a deep voice lifted in song, a voice that rose above the pulsating throb of the rockets. The words were familiar:

"There's only a few of us left,  
And we never were worth a damn,  
But I'll follow my vagrant star . . ."

Larry wondered if Ripon was hitting the bottle again. They were in a bad spot if he was, for certainly no one else on board understood the new equipment that Ripon had installed to solve the difficulties that had blocked previous attempts at interplanetary travel.

In Larry's mind there was a steadily strengthening conviction that this whole expedition was destined to failure from the start. It was too makeshift. Too poorly

organized and planned, too lightly financed. Ill-manned and poorly equipped, led by a drunken genius on a rickety ship that wasn't really fit to navigate at all, they were probably sailing to their doom somewhere in the cold reaches of outer space. If they reached the Moon at all, it would likely be as a twisted wreck dropped on the cold slope of one of that body's barren craters. Larry shrugged. He had made his decision, and he did not regret it.

And then, leaning beside one of the control room's glass ports while he kept an eye on the slowly climbing needle of the speed indicator, Larry suddenly realized that he had found the peace of mind he had so long been seeking. The clouds were a silvery ocean far below, the Moon was a glowing disc ahead. The *Sky Maid* snored onward through the night with her rockets pounding. He was again back where he belonged, standing a watch in a vessel's control room. Nothing else seemed to matter very much at the moment.

Ripon came out into the control room a little later, a faded uniform cap pushed to the back of his graying head and his empty pipe clenched in his teeth.

"It's tough not to smoke," he rumbled glumly, "but I don't want to put a strain on our none too good air-conditioning equipment. How are things going?"

"Not so well," Larry said, "The rockets aren't balanced, and we have a drift to starboard. Three micro-units in every fifteen minutes. I have to keep cutting down the port rocket tubes for short periods to equalize it."

"How's the speed?"

"Not what it should be." Larry looked dubiously at the indicator needle. "Even with as much rocket power as she's got, we've only built our speed up to a thousand miles an hour even though the atmosphere is greatly thinned. I don't think that we can build up the necessary velocity, Chief. I'm afraid it just can't be done."

"Okay, friend Pinzon," Ripon said. Catching Larry's look of puzzled surprise, the gaunt scientist smiled faintly. "There was once a man named Columbus who thought he could sail the Atlantic, which had not been done before. He was a bit of a faker and a bluff, that Genoese adventurer, and there was more than a touch of the charlatan in him. The Pinzon brothers

who commanded the other two ships of his fleet knew from the start that the voyage could never succeed. I'll admit that Columbus didn't find just what he expected to find, but he did cross the Atlantic!" Ripon laughed, and dropped a hand on Larry's shoulder. "Hold her on to the course a while, my friend. We're not licked quite so soon!"

## V

RIPON was still staring out the control room window at the disc of the Moon ahead of them. His voice came somberly as he spoke without turning around.

"What's the speed now?"

"Eleven hundred. Velocity of escape is twenty-five hundred."

"Y'know, Larry, it seems one of Fate's little ironies that the only hope of saving the people of Earth from the Gray Death lies with this creaking ship and her polyglot crew! Oh—I have no illusions about the forlornness of our hope! We have no right to get through. But I'm not entirely a fool, and I have a few aces in my sleeves. I guess it's time to try out my magnetron controls. Stand by to cut rocket motors!"

Ripon moved to several strange-looking control boxes that had been set up at one side of the room. Instrument dials glowed into light as he threw a switch, and there came a faint hum.

"These tubes are the Magnetron Oscillators," Ripon said. "These switches control the magnetic converters. This other bank governs the selectors."

"But I don't get the general principle," Larry said.

"It's simply a selective utilization of the lines of magnetic force that fill outer space. This ship is naturally para-magnetic, so that she is easily permeable by the lines of force. By charging the wires outside the hull I can make all or part of the ship diamagnetic. Furthermore, I can change its charge so that the lines will draw in either direction."

"I know enough of the general principles of magnetism to understand that," Larry said. "You can vary the direction of the effect, and perhaps vary the dynes. But . . ."

"This indicator shows the hysteresis loop, the lag of magnetic indication behind

the magnetizing force at any particular time," Ripon continued. "The heart of my system is the group of selectors and amplifiers set up in the compartments directly below us. With them I can select the magnetic currents suited to our course, and amplify them till they move the ship along with them just as the lines of magnetic force move iron filings about a bar magnet. At least," he said with a sudden flash of his reckless smile, "that's what I think I can do. If not, we'll probably never be heard of again. You'd better hope I'm right, young feller!"

Ripon's craggy profile with its jutting beard was silhouetted against the moon as he bent over his dials and switches. Twice he checked them, then he lifted one hand.

"Ready—cut rockets!" he snapped. Larry threw over the lever of the engine room indicator, and the roar of the rockets abruptly ceased.

The sudden silence was strangely startling to ears that had become accustomed to that steady pounding astern. Running feet sounded in the passage as Colton came charging into the control room to find what had gone wrong. For a moment Larry had a sensation of falling, and then the *Sky Maid* danced about like a leaf in a wind. He steadied himself by clinging to a stanchion and anxiously watched Ripon. The gaunt scientist was hunched above his control boards like a gnome, his hands leaping from switch to dial and back again at furious speed.

Then the motion abruptly ceased. The *Sky Maid* became steady as a rock, with the bright disc of the Moon dead ahead through the forward port. There was a faint singing sound from one of the control boxes, but otherwise everything was so quiet and still that it seemed as though the ship lay motionless in space. Then Larry looked at the speed indicator, and saw the needle moving steadily upward. The *Sky Maid* was shooting through the heavens at a speed faster than she had ever traveled when she was new and in good condition!

"GENTLEMEN," said Ripon, solemnly shaking hands with both Larry and Colton, "this is an historic moment! This is a prelude to that day when interplanetary travel becomes as commonplace as are rocket ship flights through the

stratosphere nowadays! No longer will the name of Crispin Gillingwater Ripon be a thing of scorn and derision. And just wait till I get a chance to spit in the faces of some of those living fossils back at the National University. . . ."

"If the ship holds together!" Larry said. Ripon sighed.

"You *would* bring that up, young feller. But maybe our luck will hold good. At least this method of travel is less hard on an old craft than the steady strain of a rocket blast. If the ship holds together, we'll be on the Moon in forty-eight hours!"

Colton was grinning broadly as Ripon left the control room a minute later. The second officer gave the points of his mustache an added twist, and then rubbed his hands together.

"Looks like the old goat really came through with something after all," he said. Larry looked at him grimly. For all Ripon's eccentricities, he was an able man in a great many things. It annoyed Larry to hear somebody like Colton, a confessed thief and an indifferent officer, speak of him in quite that tone of disrespect.

"Don't speak of Doc Ripon in that way when you're with me, Colton!" he snapped. The other man's thin mouth twisted in a sneer.

"Trying to go high hat on me, Gibson? You're no better than I am."

"If we go into that I'm likely to throw you through the bulkhead," Larry said evenly. "So we'll just let it go that I have some gratitude and respect for the man who picked me up out of the gutter—even if you haven't. Now clear out of here till it's time for you to take over the watch."

For two days and nights the *Sky Maid* moved steadily forward on her way. There was, of course, neither day nor night in the airless emptiness of outer space, but they kept routine hours on board. The whole atmosphere of the ship had brightened and changed since Ripon's utilization of magnetic force had prove practical. Even the slovenly crew went around with their shoulders straighter. The feeling of gloom and failure had been succeeded by one of optimism. Now the talk was of whether or not they would really get the desired radium salts on the Moon, and of what reward they would all receive when they got back to Earth. The watch off duty

started a poker game based on notes against the rewards they all expected to get.

Ahead of the *Sky Maid*, the Moon was now a vast disc that filled half the sky when seen from the control room ports. The bigger peaks and craters were visible to the naked eye now. Back in the after observation room, the dwindling but still vast profile of Earth had taken on a strange and unfamiliar appearance. It was a lonely feeling, to be so far from that friendly planet. Larry wondered how things were now going there, and what had caused the spread of the Gray Death in the first place. Probably a virus brought in on a meteor from some unknown and unhealthy planet.

The hope of mankind resting within her rusty hull, the *Sky Maid* slogged onward. By Earthly standards she was moving at a terrific speed, but compared with the velocity of heavenly bodies and the vastness of interplanetary space she crawled slowly across a small corner of the solar system.

## VI

AT last there came the hour when the ship hovered a few hundred miles above the surface of the Moon. Below them was a vast and uneven surface of barren and pitted rock, round craters and jagged peaks stretching to the horizon in all directions. Larry realized now how uneven the surface of the satellite really was, how different from the orange-peel appearance it had when seen through a telescope from Earth. All the crew were at landing stations. Ripon had adjusted his controls to hold the ship steady in space, and now he stepped back.

"There's no use bothering with helicopters," he said. "Since there's no atmosphere here, they'd be useless. That's probably what wrecked the ships before us—you can't make an easy landing with rockets alone, and we have no padded landing platform."

"Can't you lower her down easy with your magnetic control?" Larry asked.

"That's what I hope to do, but we're not experienced and there may be a jolt. Cut off the reserve air tanks, and have all hands put on space suits."

The crew of the *Sky Maid* looked like a group of fantastic monsters in the

metal-cloth space suits with their round helmets of duro-glass. Designed for use by emergency repair crews aboard stratholiners in case of trouble, the space suits would keep a man alive and warm in an airless atmosphere for a great many hours. Small containers of chemicals kept the air purified, and ear-phones made communication possible.

"Stand by for a landing!" Ripon's voice buzzed in the ear phones as Larry reported all hands ready. "We're going down!"

The *Sky Maid* went down in a series of jerky drops. With eventual refinement, a ship equipped with the Ripon Magnetic Control would probably be able to come down as gently as a falling leaf, but this first apparatus was crude and experimental. Just at the end one of Ripon's elbows touched the wrong switch. The rocky surface swept up to meet them at high speed. He shouted hoarsely and spun compensating dials, but before he could check the momentum they struck with a heavy crash. The ship heeled over, and all the lights went out. As Larry was flung off his feet he heard a sharp hiss of escaping air.

**M**OMENTARILY half stunned, Larry lay on the floor in a corner of the control room with the body of another of the crew across his legs. Then he saw a bulky, space-suited figure heave to its feet across the room and heard Ripon's voice in his ear phones.

"Leaping ray-blasts, what a crash! But I seem to be alive and in one piece. How about the rest of you?"

Other men struggled to their feet and answered their names. One had his helmet smashed and was already dead in the airless atmosphere that remained after the air had rushed out through the shattered wall of the control room, but the rest had nothing more serious than a few bruises.

"Well," Colton said. "Here we are! And here we're likely to stay."

"It may not be that serious. The first thing is to take stock of our damage."

The *Sky Maid*, they found on making a complete survey, was far less seriously damaged than might have been the case. The wall of the control room was punctured by a jagged splinter of rock, but there were only a few other minor leaks.

Many of the compartments had retained their air. Once the hole was patched and the other leaks stopped, their reserve tanks still held enough air to let them make a homeward voyage in safety. The network of wires outside the hull would require considerable reconditioning, but none of the internal magnetic equipment was ruined.

"About five days' work!" Ripon summed up. "And it's primarily a job for the engine room force. Gibson, Colton, the two quartermasters and I will go ashore with several days' supply of chemical capsules for the air conditioners on our helmets. Chief Engineer Masterson remains in command of the ship. Get her back in navigating shape as soon as you can, Chief."

Masterson, a grimy and bullet-headed little man with a drooping mustache and something of the look of a mournful Airedale, slapped the side of his duro-glass helmet in a casual salute. Larry knew that the ship was being left in good hands. He had come to have considerable respect for the taciturn engineer. He did not know why Masterson was on board the *Sky Maid*, very likely because he had been in some trouble similar to Larry's own, but he was certainly an efficient engineer. He wished he felt as sure of the three men who were going ashore with Ripon and himself. Colton he considered thoroughly untrustworthy, and the two quartermasters were a pair of sullen derelicts of the sort that Ripon had picked up off the beach for most of the crew.

"Landing party ashore!" Ripon snapped. "Let's get going! This isn't an ordinary exploring party, and every hour counts."

## VII

**T**HEY stood on a bare expanse of pitted rock. The *Sky Maid* had crashed on the outer slope of one of the craters, and the ground rose steadily to the jagged rim of the rocky bowl. Other bare peaks were all about them, black teeth against the starry sky. The earth gleamed large and pale above them. The scene was bleak and silent, unutterably desolate and forlorn, and the little group of Earthlings drew closer together. Then Ripon pointed up the ridge.

"We'll go up there and look around. Larry—you carry the radium detector. We

mustn't let the exploring fever make us forget our main purpose in having come here."

They toiled slowly up the slope. Walking was difficult. Due to the power of their Earthly muscles on this planet of so much lighter gravity, they had a tendency to bound into the air at each step in spite of the heavy leaden soles on the feet of the space suits. Gradually they learned the necessary muscular control, a sort of sliding step, and then they made better progress.

Ripon was some yards in the lead as they reached the rim of the crater. For a moment the tall scientist was silhouetted against the stars, then he abruptly dropped flat on the rock and motioned back to them to do the same. His voice was a faint whisper in the ear phones.

"Crawl up here slowly, one at a time. Careful!"

Larry was the first to join him, lying flat on the rock at Ripon's side. Together they peered down into the crater. It's flat floor was swarming with some sort of queer animal!

This particular crater was a small one, and the level floor was only some thirty yards below the rim. Larry stared in amazement at the creatures who were coming to sit in long rows around a small mound in the center of the crater. He hardly knew whether to call them men or animals. They had the hard shell and articulated legs of an insect, but their faces had a semi-human appearance in spite of the pair of long antennae that grew out of their foreheads. Their feet made a dry rustling sound as they clambered down over the rock, and they carried metal clubs with spiked heads. Larry saw that they walked with four of their six limbs while the upper pair were equipped with three curved fingers each. On the top of each antenna was a round ball that glowed with a phosphorescent light.

"I thought there wasn't any life on the Moon!" Larry whispered. Ripon grinned at him through the duro-glass of his helmet.

"You thought a lot of things that were wrong, young feller!"

It was a weird scene in the cold pale light of the Earth. Some of the insect men came out of small, dome-shaped

mounds that might have been houses. Others came climbing down the far side of the crater. Their glowing antennae bobbed in ceaseless motion, and there was a constant dry clicking. Suddenly Larry realized that the creatures were talking together!

That meant that there was at least some atmosphere on the Moon! Enough to carry sound! Perhaps it had a different composition than the atmosphere of the Earth. It was certainly very thin, for the air in the control room had instantly escaped through the shattered side and the man with the broken helmet had smothered, but there was enough here to sustain these odd creatures. Then Ripon touched him on the arm, and Larry saw something that a group of the insect-men were very ceremoniously carrying to the mound in the center of the crater. It was an ordinary metal chair of a very common and familiar Earthly pattern, the sort of chair to be found in the cabins and mess rooms of any stratho-liner.

"One of those old ships must have reached the Moon after all!" Larry whispered. "That chair must be from the wreckage."

"Heaven help the survivors if those many-legged devils got hold of them!"

"They can't be very strong, with the Moon's gravity so slight," Larry said.

"That doesn't prove a thing. They can be light in frame and still very strong. Think how many times his own weight our ant can carry, or how far a flea can jump."

The chair had been placed in the center of the mound, and the Insect-men drew back. Now thin jets of steam or mist began to pour up around the mound, forming a foggy curtain that hid it. The mist only rose a little way, then dropped slowly down again to form an icy film on the cold rocks. The jets ceased, and mist vanished, and Larry Gibson stared in open-mouthed amazement. A dark-haired girl was standing erect on the crest of the mound!

## VIII

**T**HE girl was white-skinned and lovely, utterly different from the grotesque creatures who surrounded her. Larry was crouching near enough to see her faintly smiling eyes, and the curve of her red lips,



and the dark hair that fell to her waist behind. Except for the grotesque metallic helmet on her head, and the fact that she wore no clothing except for a silver loin cloth, she might have been a girl of the sort to be seen along the elevated crosswalks of New York City.

"Do you see her too?" Ripon whispered. "I do."

"We can't both be that crazy, so she must really be there. But how she breathes in that atmosphere, and how she avoids freezing to death, is more than I can tell you."

The ceremony had evidently some sort of a religious significance, for the Insect-men were clicking rhythmically and were bowing down before the dark-haired girl. Goddess of the Moon! The girl's head-dress was a grotesque representation of an insect, set with jewels. At the tops of the flexible antennae were a pair of giant rubies.

"Boy! Wouldn't I like to get my hands on those stones!" Colton whispered from where he crouched on Ripon's left.

Then Larry noticed something else! A group of perhaps a hundred of the Insect-men were moving swiftly forward between the ranks of their bowing comrades. This group carried shields as well as clubs, and they had the purposeful air of men with a grim and serious errand to perform. The girl was staring over the heads of the crowd with a distant and goddess-like manner, and did not notice the newcomers till they had almost reached her. Then her eyes widened in alarm. She leaped up from her throne and burst into a torrent of shrill clicking.

In an instant the crater was in a turmoil. The group of the heavily armed Insect-men charged straight for the mound in the center. Others flung themselves in their path, rallying to the defense of the Goddess. There was a wild flurry of swinging clubs. The spiked heads clanged on metal shields, or cracked sharply on the brittle brown shells of the Insect-men. The significance of the scene before him was still obscure to Larry, but it was evident that some kind of a revolt had broken out.

The rebels among the Insect-men were outnumbered, but their metal shields gave them a big advantage and they were better organized. Like a spear-point they drove

straight through the confused mass of worshippers and surrounded the low knoll in the center. They brushed its defenders aside and swarmed up toward the dark-haired Goddess. Larry had already drawn his ray-gun, but Ripon was the first to leap to his feet.

"Come on, young feller!" he roared. "That girl is the first human thing we've seen on the Moon. We can't let her down. Let's show those many-legged devils how an Earth man can fight!"

Larry and Ripon went down the slope of the crater in a series of bounding leaps. The milling Insect-men opened before them, seeming to welcome these unexpected reinforcements. Some of the rebels had already forced the struggling girl to her knees and were lashing her hands behind her back. A solid rank of them faced about with their round shields locked and a tossing fringe of spiked clubs waving atop the metal wall.

THE two Earthlings dove for the shield-wall with their guns flashing. Larry ducked as one of the Insect-men hurled a club which just missed his glass helmet, then pressed the trigger of his ray-gun. The murky beam of the rays stabbed into the shield, melted a hole through it in a fraction of a second, and struck down the man behind. The flashing ray-guns of the two adventurers ripped the shield-wall asunder. A wave of the loyal Insect-men poured in behind them.

Larry shifted his ray-gun to his left hand, and snatched up a fallen club with his right. It was heavier than he had expected, a well balanced and efficient weapon. The hard brown shells of the rebels cracked like china under the smashing blows of his earthly muscles. Then he bounded up on the mound and struck down the pair of rebels who held the girl. Her wrists were now tied behind her.

Throwing an arm about the girl's shoulders, Larry hastily faced about. Ripon was a few yards away. A ring of his slain lay around him, but his weapons had been knocked from his hands and he was struggling in the grip of a pair of the Insect-men. A third of the creatures was swinging a club to strike a blow at the scientist's glass helmet. Larry instantly fired, the beam of the ray striking the arm that held

the club and shearing it clean off at the shoulder. A viscous yellow liquid dripped out, and the creature dropped writhing on the rock while it clicked in pain. Then Colton and the two quartermasters came charging belatedly up, and the fight was over.

The crater was dotted with the still forms of dead Insect-men. Larry noticed that their hard shells gleamed dully in the dim light. The surviving rebels had fled off across the far rim of the crater, and the rest of the throng had gone chasing after them. No one remained in the crater except the strange girl and the party from the *Sky Maid*.

When Larry had freed the girl's hands, she turned to the five Earth-men and touched her forehead in a gesture of thanks. Then she stepped across to touch some hidden spring on the far side of the mound, and a trap door opened in what had apparently been solid rock. The girl led the way down a narrow flight of stairs, motioning for the last man down to pull the trap closed behind them.

They stood in a small chamber that had walls of roughly smoothed rock. It was evidently the work of men, for tool marks showed here and there. It was lighted by a green globe set in one wall. The globe appeared to be made of some kind of flexible glass, and it glowed with a faint greenish radiance that overcame the darkness enough to give the place a dim and eerie light. At one side of the room was an oval hole like a slanting well cut in the floor. Beside it stood a pile of low, flat carts. They were about two feet wide by four feet long, and they were supported on axles bearing small wheels the diameter of a man's hand.

The girl spoke to Larry twice, first in the clicking talk of the Insect-men and then in some soft and musical tongue that was unlike anything Larry had ever heard. Both times he shook his head. Motioning for them to follow her, she put one of the low carts down near the rim of the hole and sat on it. Then she gave a push with her hands—and vanished.

"Come on," Larry said, taking another of the carts. Colton stared at him.

"Down that hole?" he asked.

"Why not? We've got to find out what all this is about."

A SECOND later Larry Gibson found himself shooting down into the interior of the Moon by means of a sloping tunnel cut in the rock. A series of the greenish globes were set in the ceiling at intervals to give the rocky shaft a dim light. The wheels of the cart ran in two grooves cut in the floor, and he shot swiftly downward with a dull humming sound.

Larry was trying to estimate the speed of his downward movement. It was not so terribly fast, probably not really as fast as the nearness of the walls made it appear while they flashed by on either hand. The slope was a gentle one. Although he had gathered considerable momentum, he had no feeling of the car being out of control.

As the minutes passed, Larry saw something else. The moisture that had been on the outside of his space suit from the air within the *Sky Maid* had frozen into a white frost a few seconds after the breaking of the control room wall let the outer cold into the ship. Now the frost was melting! They were getting into warmer regions as they went down. Perhaps they were also running into a heavier atmosphere! Larry held his hand up before him, and had a distinct feeling of pressure against it from the rush of air sweeping up to meet him. A minute later he had tested the atmosphere with the portable oxygen-gauge carried in the equipment pocket of any space suit. Then he took off his helmet.

The air was quite warm, and though still very thin it was definitely breathable. Its clean, earthy odor was a pleasant contrast to the chemical product used over and over again inside the helmet of a space suit. A moment later he saw a brighter light ahead, and realized that he had come to the bottom of the long shaft.

They were in a square room whose walls were of polished gray stone. As Larry got up from his cart and moved in aside from the landing platform, the girl gave him a friendly smile. She had already taken off her ornately jeweled head-dress and placed it in a metal cabinet fastened to the wall. Completely without embarrassment, she tied a strip of gayly colored silk across her bare breasts. Then she tossed her long hair back from her forehead and bound another strip of silk to keep it in place.

"That was quite a ride," Larry said.

He had spoken in English, knowing that the girl would not understand but hoping the sound of the words would convey a generally friendly impression. She stared at him in startled surprise for a second.

"It is much pleasanter than the upward trip," she said at last.

"But—but you spoke in English!" Larry gasped.

"Why shouldn't I? My father is a man from Earth. I am Diana Staunton."

## IX

AS the others came sliding down into the room, Larry gave each one a formal introduction to Diana. The glow in the girl's eyes showed that she enjoyed their utter amazement. For a girl who had been born on the Moon, even though of Earthly parents, Diana Staunton had a great deal of poise and self-possession.

"I am only a Goddess to the sluggish minds of the Insect-men," she explained in answer to Ripon's question. "To our own people of the Lost Caverns I am simply the daughter of one of the nobles."

"I knew your father thirty years ago," Ripon said.

"He has always told me that other men from Earth would come some day."

"Your father can tell me most of the things I want to know, but I am wondering how you managed to survive up there on the surface where there is little or no air and it is always so cold."

"I could not stay very long." From a fold in her loin cloth the girl drew out a tightly closed glass bottle that held some white tablets. "These contain oxygen mixed with some gases unknown on Earth, the whole very strongly compressed into solid form. Ten minutes after I swallow one, it is safe for me to go out on the surface. The effect lasts for about fifteen minutes."

"Pretty risky if anything delays you," Larry said. Diana shrugged, and her blue eyes grew somber.

"Someone has to do it. The loyalty of the Insect-men is our greatest protection against the evil Lords of Gral-Thala. This is the first time there has ever been anything like a revolt among the Insect-men.

I do not know what lies behind it, but it probably means trouble for us of the Lost Caverns."

Colton was the last to come down the rocky shaft. Larry noticed that the second officer was ill at ease, disinclined to meet his eyes, and wondered if Colton was ashamed of either his late entry into the fight or his fear of coming down into the Moon's interior. Hardly likely! From what he knew of Gerald Colton, the man was not likely to be ashamed of anything he did.

They went through a maze of gray walled passages, still trending downward. Once or twice Larry thought he heard stealthy footsteps behind them, but there was no one in sight when he looked back. On several occasions they passed sentries wearing a makeshift armor, who saluted Diana with long bladed swords. Sometimes they spoke to her in English with a peculiar soft accent, sometimes in that strange tongue that Diana had first used.

Larry noticed that these Lunarians looked only slightly different from the peoples of Earth. They had larger eyes, and a greater delicacy of feature. The principle distinguishing feature was their very thin legs. Often they had wide shoulders and deep chests, but since they did not need strong supporting muscles in view of the Moon's slight gravity their legs were thin and narrow.

The sentries stared curiously at the Earthmen in their bulky space suits, but the fact that the newcomers were with Diana Staunton seemed to be sufficient passport. They began to pass a greater number of people in the corridors, and finally they stepped through a heavily guarded gate and came to a vast cavern.

The place was huge, extending for a good mile ahead of them and with a lofty roof lost in the shadows overhead. Some of the gigantic columns that supported the roof were made of heavy stone blocks. Others were natural rock that had been smoothed and polished. All over the floor of the cavern were narrow streets, and small cottages built of some queer composition that came in a rainbow of different colors, and little patches of some sort of green grass. A golden and rather misty light pervaded the whole cavern. Square shafts of a brighter radiance darted down

from above at irregular intervals, and wherever one of them struck the floor of the cavern there was a small patch of cultivated ground with long-leaved plants.

"Agriculture by chemical control!" Ripon whispered in Larry's ear. Diana glanced back at them over her shoulder.

"This is Chotan, largest of the Lost Caverns," she said. "The Council of Elders is now in session, and it will be best that we go direct to them."

"Why do you call these the Lost Caverns?" Larry asked.

"Because we who live here are outlaws, and the location of these vast caves is not known to the Lords of Gral-Thala who rule the other side of the Moon."

"Apparently not all the inhabitants of the Moon are so friendly," Ripon said.

"If you came into the hands of the Lords of Gral-Thala," she said grimly, "they would tear the skin from your bodies and use it to lace their scented golden boots!"

Large-eyed Lunarians stared curiously at the Earth-men as they hurried through the streets of the underground village. Diana led them direct to a broad-beamed, red-roofed building that stood by itself in the center of the cavern. A dozen elderly men sat behind a long table of carved wood that was black and cracked with age. It was, Larry realized, the first wooden thing he had seen since he landed on the Moon. At either side of the chamber stood a squad of armored warriors.

Larry was staring at a curious device that was carved in the center of the table, and carried on a banner hung above the heads of the council, and inlaid in a white metal on the bluish steel shields of the guards. And then he recognized it! It was the crescent Earth, the profile of the mother planet as seen from the Moon when the Americas were still in sunlight and the shadows of night were creeping across the Atlantic. The sight of it made him homesick. The crescent moon had been a religious symbol to many of the ancient races of Earth, and it was fitting that the crescent earth should hold a similar place on this isolated satellite.

It seemed to Larry that Diana was a trifle nervous over something. She had entered the council chamber with an air of confidence, lifting one arm in a stately gesture of greeting and asking the Elders

to accept the men from Earth as friends and guests, but he sensed a degree of uncertainty behind her manner. In hasty phrases she told the council of the revolt of part of the Insect-men, and of the timely arrival of the strangers from the mother planet.

"And so I request that you accept these men into the Brotherhood of the Caverns!" she finished. The graybeards behind the long table nodded gravely, but before they could speak another voice rang out in a sharp challenge.

"And I, O Elders of Chotan, demand that these interlopers be put to death in accordance with the ancient law of the Caverns concerning unwanted strangers!"

## X

THE speaker was a fair-haired young man in a green cloak. He looked more like an Earthling than a Lunarian, with his sturdy legs and small eyes. He pointed an accusing finger straight at Larry in a dramatic gesture, and Diana wheeled to face him with anger in her voice.

"You talk very loudly of the ancient laws, Xylon, for a newcomer only recently taken into the Brotherhood because you fled as an outlaw from the Lords of Gral-Thala!"

"I did not make the laws!" Xylon retorted.

"The death penalty for strangers has not been strictly enforced for many years—or you would not now be alive! It is up to the decision of the Elders!"

The council chamber was in an uproar, with shouted phrases flung back and forth. Larry laid a hand on the butt of his ray-gun. A keen-eyed officer of the guards caught the gesture, and instantly Larry found a pair of rifles directed at his chest. At least, they looked like some sort of compressed air rifles. They had fiber stocks, and long barrels, and a cylindrical magazine beneath the barrel. Then a deep voice dominated the tumult as a red-haired man in full armor forced his way through to the forefront of the crowd.

"The girl is right, O Elders and members of the Brotherhood!" he boomed. "Xylon talks like a fool. I, Pyatt of Kagan, urge that the strangers from Earth be accepted. Let Xylon remain among us for

a little while longer before he attempts to dominate our councils!"

Larry could sense the swing of sentiment in their favor, could feel the lessening of the tension. The man called Xylon shrugged and turned away. Then the council took a formal vote, waving the ancient death penalty and allowing the strangers the freedom of the Caverns. One of the Elders near the end of the table rose to his feet. He wore the typical black robes of the Council, but as Larry looked closely at the man's lined face he saw the resemblance to Diana and knew that he was looking at Lester Staunton.

"Since these men are from what was once my own land," Staunton said, "I will make them comfortable in my house for the duration of their stay here."

As the crowd began to stream out of the council-chamber, the red-headed man pushed his way through to Ripon and Larry. He was unusually burly and big-thewed for a Lunarian, and though his face was marred by a pair of old scars he had a wide and cheerful smile.

"Welcome to the Cavern of Chotan!" he boomed. "I am Pyatt of Kagan, military commander of all the armed forces of the Caverns. Later I will want to talk to you about that revolt of the Insect-men, which is something that has not happened before. Also, we will drink a goblet of wine together."

"Then you have wines on the Moon?" Ripon asked, visibly brightening.

"Aye, wines of many sorts. Though my own taste runs more to the strong-waters that fire the blood and set a man's head to spinning."

"I can see that you and I have a lot in common!" Ripon grinned.

JUST before they left, Xylon came up to shake hands with Larry.

"No hard feelings, Earthling!" he said. "It is just that the safety and liberties of the Caverns are very precious to one like myself, who has so recently become an outlaw, and I did not think that we should take any chances."

"That's all right," Larry said shortly. Now that he saw Xylon at really close range, he realized that the man was older than he had thought. His appearance of youth vanished when you saw the many

fine wrinkles in his face and the weariness around his eyes. He had a dissolute appearance. Xylon might be sincere in his bid for friendship, but Larry felt that there was something serpentine and evil about the man.

With Diana and her father and a few others, they walked along one of the many winding paths of Chotan. Larry noticed that the chemically grown plants had no scent at all. The motionless, warm air was suffused with a misty and golden light. Small, neat houses built in various bright colors stood amid their plots of grass. It was a strange scene to Earthly eyes, that cavern far below the Moon's chill surface, but it was a pleasant spot in its way.

The women they passed along the walks were dressed like Diana, in a gayly colored loin-cloth with a narrow band across the breasts. Most of the men wore a loose, colored cloak in addition to the single garment. Only a few were armed.

Larry had taken off the right mitten of his space suit to shake hands with Pyatt and Xylon in the council chamber. Several times he had started to replace the mitten, but something had always distracted him and he was still carrying it in his left hand. Now, as he happened to give the mitten a shake, a small insect of a blood-red color fell out and landed on the walk. It looked something like a miniature scorpion. Larry had only a hasty glimpse before Pyatt of Kagan leaped forward and crushed the crawling thing with the heavy sole of his sandal.

"That was a *spanto*!" he said. "Their bite means death within ten seconds. I wonder how it came to be in your glove!"

"I wonder myself!" Larry said grimly, looking across the field at the green-cloaked figure of Xylon, who had turned off on another of the branching walks. It would not have been hard for Xylon to have dropped the insect in his glove! As if in answer to his thought, Diana spoke quietly:

"I do not trust Xylon any farther than I can see him, friend Larry! There is something unclean in his eyes when he looks at me."

"If he looks at you too much while I'm here I'll break his jaw!" Larry said. The girl looked up at him with a sudden smile that was also a challenge.

"I begin to understand why my father

has always said that I would like the men from Earth better than the Lunarians!"

## XI

THEY sat in Professor Staunton's laboratory, a square chamber where Earthly equipment taken from the wreck of his space-ship was mingled with typically Lunarian furniture and equipment. The walls were light blue, of that polished composition resembling bakelite that was used for building in the Caverns. The walls were about ten feet high, and they ended in an ornamental cornice without any ceiling or roof at all. Overhead there was a glow of misty light, and far above the rocky top of the cavern.

"Why should we need roofs?" Diana said in reply to Larry's surprised comment. "Here in these Caverns there is neither rain nor snow nor wind, nor any change in temperature at all. The walls give privacy, and there is no need for anything else."

Ripon was bending over a table on which Staunton had spread a large map of the Moon. The cavern of Chotan was indicated by a red dot, and Larry saw that there were a dozen others scattered around within a radius of a few hundred miles.

"Our space-cruiser was wrecked near one of the entrances to this cavern when we landed here thirty years ago," Staunton said. "As you have guessed, it was the inability to land safely with rockets, in a practically airless atmosphere where helicopters were useless, that smashed us. As you did, we had fortunately put on space suits before trying to land. Our ship was too badly wrecked for any chance of return."

"But how have you succeeded in getting all these people to learn English?" Ripon asked.

"They knew that language before I came! But it is best that I give you a hasty outline of Lunarian history. The simple-minded but husky Insect-men were the aboriginal inhabitants of the Moon. Long æons ago, while most of the people of Earth were living crudely in caves and using chipped stones for tools and weapons, an isolated people developed a high civilization in what I have roughly identified as the region of the Himalayas. A

series of great earthquakes destroyed their civilization, but a large number of them escaped and came to the Moon in some kind of a space-ship. Here they found, in those days, a small planetary body that had a thin but breathable air. They founded a civilization on the other side of the Moon where it is always sunny, and called it Gral-Thala. Those were pleasant days, if the old legends are to be believed, the Golden Age of Lunarian civilization."

For a moment Staunton paused. All those in the room, including the Lunarians who had been familiar with this tale since childhood, hung intently on his words. The broad face of Pyatt of Kagan was somber and moody as he sat bent forward with the scabbard of his sword resting across his armored knees.

"As the centuries passed, the atmosphere continued to thin," Staunton went on, "so the Ancients took care to preserve what was left. Gral-Thala is in the fertile part of the Moon, and lies in a vast valley completely surrounded by a lofty mountain range. By means of the superior engineering knowledge of the Ancients, they built a lofty wall or barrier along the crest of the range so that its top is miles above the level of the valley floor. They then sucked all the air within the Great Barrier. Gral-Thala itself thus lies in a great pool of air surrounded by the ranges and the barrier. On the rest of the Moon, as here, air only remains in deep crevices and caverns like this."

"But these caves were a great labor in themselves . . ." Ripon began.

"ORIGINALLY these caverns were built as outposts of Gral-Thala, built here because of their nearness to valuable mineral deposits. People came out from the sunlit cities within the Great Barrier to put in a tour of duty in the caverns. Again life on the Moon had reached a pleasant equilibrium. And then came the great disaster! Some two centuries ago a group of several hundred outlaws fleeing from Earth came here in a big space-ship."

"The *Mercury*!" Larry exclaimed.

"Exactly. Those men and women who came from Earth were few in comparison to the population of the Moon, but they were cruel and ruthless and they had weapons of war. The peaceful Lunarians had

at that time no weapons at all, for they had no need for them. Within a few months the invaders made themselves Lords of all Gral-Thala! That was when English, the language of the invaders, came to be spoken by everybody on the Moon as well as the softer tongue of the Lunarians themselves. A few of the hardier folk in Gral-Thala fled to these caverns as outlaws. The invaders made only half-hearted attempts to come after them, and with the passing of the years the location of these refuges has been forgotten by people living within the Great Barrier. That is why these places are now known as the Lost Caverns."

"And the invaders still rule?"

"Their descendants are still Lords of Gral-Thala. Cruel and ruthless they always were, decadent and dissolute they have now become as well, but they still rule the sunny valley that was the pride of the ancient Lunarians. They hold the power, and they are aided by a few groups among the people of Gral-Thala who have sacrificed their honor to fawn upon their masters. Our spies, who penetrate beyond the barrier, tell us that before long there will come a day when the people are ready for revolt—but the time is not yet."

"But surely!" said Pyatt of Kagan, his deep voice breaking in on the low monotone in which Staunton had spoken, "surely our visitors will return to Earth, now that interplanetary travel has become possible, and bring us the warriors and equipment to storm the high palaces of the tyrants of Gral-Thala!"

"I should think that the Confederation of Earth would send help, particularly since the original invaders were outlaws from that planet," Staunton said. "How about it, friend Ripon? How are conditions back on Earth at this time?"

Ripon straightened up and shook his shoulders. The glow in his eyes faded away, and the lines in his face deepened once more.

"The Lunarians can look for no help from Earth until one thing is accomplished," he said. "I have been letting scientific enthusiasm make me lose sight of our reason for coming here. How are conditions on Earth, you ask? I can tell you in a single sentence. Unless we of Earth very quickly get a new supply of radium salts suitable for use with the Ries-

ling Method, in a few weeks we all perish!"

"I do not understand."

In a few hasty phrases Ripon sketched the development of the terrible plague that was so swiftly robbing Earth of its inhabitants. At the end Staunton leaned back in his chair.

"Such salts are available on the Moon in ample quantity," he said slowly, and something in the quality of his voice robbed the words of the reassurance they would otherwise have held, "but—they are all located well within the area of the Great Barrier. And the Lords of Gral-Thala would never let you have even a single milligram!"

"Then there's only one thing to be done!"

Larry stood up and began to peel off his space suit. "If someone will show me the way, I'll go into Gral-Thala and bring out as much of the radiatron extract as I can carry."

"And I will go with you!" boomed Pyatt of Kagan. "By Gorton and Laila, mythical gods of the Moon, it will take more than a few of those cold-eyed tyrants to stop us!"

## XII

TIME was the thing that counted. The remorseless pressure of minutes and hours that passed and could never be recalled! The tyrants who lorded it over Gral-Thala had no weapons more deadly than the electronic guns that had been common on Earth two hundred years before. A battalion of troops from Earth, wearing armor of dura-steel and carrying ray-guns, could probably have overthrown the Invaders very quickly. But—there was no time! The toll of the Gray Death was increasing with each passing hour, back there on the Good Green Planet, and the little group on the Moon would have to do what they could without hope of assistance.

They could not pause for proper preparations or careful planning. It was only half an Earth day after they had landed on the Moon, time enough to snatch a few hours' sleep, that Larry found himself moving up toward the surface in a slowly crawling cable car. Chotan already lay behind and far below them, and the oxygen indicator fastened to the sleeve of the

space suit showed him that the air was thinning rapidly.

Colton and Pyatt were with him. All three of them wore space suits of the Lunarian patterns, that had a metal helmet with glass windows at the front and sides, for the difference in design of the space suits from the *Sky Maid* would have made them too conspicuous. Pyatt had come along because he had often penetrated beyond the Great Barrier in disguise, and a second Lunarian was waiting for them up on the surface.

Ripon had also wanted to come, the idea of this daring raid setting the old, reckless light dangling in his eyes. Finally he agreed that one of the leaders of the *Sky Maid* expedition had better remain in the Caverns in case of disaster to the raiders.

"That's the hell of getting along in years, young feller!" he rumbled regretfully. "There's nothing I'd like better than to penetrate the barrier with you and pull the whiskers of the tyrants in their lair. A quick wit and a ready weapon! But I couldn't keep up with you younger men if the going gets hot—though I never thought the day would come when I'd hear Crispin Gillingwater Ripon admit a thing like that!—and you'd better go on without me."

"We'll be back soon," Larry said. Ripon snorted.

"If you're not back in five days I'm coming after you with the crew of the *Sky Maid* and as many of the folk of the Caverns as I can get to come along!"

THE Cavern of Chotan was in that part of the Moon which is sometimes in sunlight and sometimes in darkness, and it was night when they came out of the tunnel. The moisture on the space suit instantly froze into a fine white frost. A few Lunarian sentries waited for them there, and nearly a hundred of the Insect-men. With them were two carts that had high wheels and springs, something like an old-fashioned Earthly buckboard.

For a few moments, Pyatt talked to the leaders of the Insect-men in their clicking tongue. The glowing knobs atop their antennæ bobbed up and down as they nodded their heads in understanding. Then Pyatt motioned Colton into one of the carts and climbed in beside him. Another Lunarian, slender even in the bulky space suit,

climbed into the second cart beside Larry. Pyatt swung his right arm forward.

A score of the Insect-men instantly scampered ahead as scouts, spreading out like the spokes of a fan. Small parties went out to either flank. The rest, about thirty to each cart, gripped the trailing ropes and darted ahead with the wagons following behind them. They went at almost incredible speed, the four legs of each giving them a steady drive.

Even though the Insect-men were picking the smooth stretches of the rock and were evidently following a definite though unmarked trail, it was rough going. The light wagons jolted and banged as they whizzed along, and Larry had to cling to the rail with both hands to keep from being thrown off.

"Is all the way as rough as this?" he panted to his companion.

"Better soon," the Lunarian said shortly.

After about three hours they turned into a smooth and level road. It wound up and down over the rolling rocky plain, evidently a highway of great age. Occasionally they passed crumbling ruins beside it. Larry supposed that the road and the ruins dated back to those very ancient days before the Lunarians withdrew their shrinking supply of air within the Great Barrier.

Now that the road was smooth, the Insect-men pulled the carts along at a whizzing pace. The light wheels whirred as the wagons shot ahead. The scene, Larry reflected, was like a nightmare. All about him were the chill mountains and craters of the Moon, lifting their jagged peaks against the cold stars. Ahead of the speeding wagon ran the toiling cluster of Insect-men, their hard shells gleaming faintly in the starlight and their glowing antennæ bobbing in a swift rhythm as they ran. The treads of the wheels rattled on the rocky surface of the road, the horny feet of the Insect-men made a steady scraping sound as they ran. The two men seated in the cart ahead were monstrous and misshapen figures in their space suits.

Larry's companion had remained sullenly silent, in spite of several efforts to start a conversation. This was unusual in one of the normally pleasant and talkative Lunarians, but Larry had not thought much about it. Now, as he made some remark about the speed of their progress, he heard



a low chuckle and in his earphones sounded the voice of Diana Staunton.

"Yes, Larry, we travel fast. In a few days we will enter the zone of sunlight."

"You" he exclaimed. "This expedition is too dangerous. I would never have let you come if I had known."

"Why else do you think I kept so silent until now, when it is too late to send me back?" she asked, and though he could not see her face through the glass of her helmet in the darkness he could tell that she was smiling. "Neither would Pyatt of Kagan or my father have let me come. I stole the space suit of the young man who was to accompany you and left him locked in a soreroom."

"You will have to remain outside when we go within the barrier"

"Where you go, I go," she said with finality.

**SUNRISE** on the Moon! There was no sudden onslaught of light as on the Earth, for the Moon day was twenty-eight days long! Yet, as they progressed steadily toward the horizon, the Moon's rotation brought the edge of the sun gradually into sight above the barren horizon, and as the days passed, a blinding glare of light swept in upon them and they moved the dark glasses into place in front of the windows of their space-suit helmets.

The temperature rose rapidly with the coming of the two weeks' sunlight, and before long the frost on the space suits was melting. Then, stretching along the crest of a mighty mountain range ahead, Larry saw a lofty gray wall that went so high its top was almost lost from view above. They had come within sight of the Great Barrier!

### XIII

**SEVERAL** times along the way they had been halted by sentry-patrols from some of the other outlaw caverns, who warned them that an unusual number of strong parties of troops from Gral-Thala were roaming the waste-land. However, they came without incident to a tiny outlaw hide-out. This was within half a mile of one of the caverns that was under the domination of the Lords of Gral-Thala.

Two hours later Larry and the others

stood with a score of other people, in an air-lock in a great tunnel that led through the mountain range and into Gral-Thala. All these people were residents of the valley returning from a tour of duty in the caverns, and the four outlaws from Chotan had been furnished with forged documents that gave them the same identity.

The space suits had been removed and hung on numbered racks. The three men wore the tight tunics and loose trousers that were the customary dress within the valley, as distinguished from the loin cloth and cloak of the cavern outlaws. This was fortunate, for the trousers concealed the sturdy Earthly legs of Larry and Colton which would have stood out in sharp contrast to the typical spindly shanks of the otherwise well-built Lunarians. Diana wore a loose robe, with tight wrappings concealing her hair and a thin veil over her face.

A heavy guard of soldiers checked the papers of all the travelers before they let them through. These troops wore light armor, and each carried an electronic gun slung from his shoulder. The officers were evidently of the Invaders, cruel-eyed men cast in the same mold as Xylon. The men were Lunarians, generally of a rather debased type and drawn from among the worst element in the population. A heavy-featured trooper glanced at Larry's papers in a perfunctory manner, then handed them back.

"All right, all right!" he growled. "Get along. Don't block the way!"

The tunnel ended on the inner slope of the mountain range surrounding Gral-Thala, where many cars ran down the steep incline into the city below. It was a pleasant and smiling land that Larry Gibson saw before him, a sunlit and fertile valley so vast that even the lofty range on the far side was invisible over the horizon. Towns and villages dotted the plain. Farms lay among their fertile fields. A small river wound through the center. Directly below him, clustered against this part of the valley wall, was a mighty city.

"This is the city of Pandonaria," Diana's voice came softly through her veil, "capital city of Gral-Thala."

The city itself was a terraced mass of colored buildings cut by many streets and interspersed with gardens. Several tower-

ing palaces of white and gold, the abodes of the Lords of Gral-Thala, dominated the lower buildings. It was good to see real sunlight again! To see birds flying overhead! To smell the odor of flowers and growing things, in contrast to the flat and motionless air of the Lost Caverns! It was hard to believe that this pleasant spot was really the scene of such a brutal tyranny as he had been told. Then they rounded a bend in the sloping road and came to an abrupt halt.

AT the side of the road stood a sort of gallows, made of strips of a ruddy metal bolted together. From it hung the nude body of a young Lunarian girl. She was suspended by her bound wrists high above her head, and her feet swung far off the ground. From the clotted blood at her bound wrists, and the way the eternal sun of the valley had burned her skin, Larry knew that she had hung there many hours. The girl was far gone but she was not yet dead. At intervals her drooping head moved feebly from side to side. A pair of armored soldiers leaned on their weapons below the gallows. Around the girl's neck hung a sign, lettered in the archaic English script that was the official language of Gral-Thala:

"THIS GIRL DARED STRIKE ONE OF THE NOBLES OF GRAL-THALA WHO CONDESCENDED TO NOTICE HER."

Fierce anger filled Larry Gibson's heart, a consuming anger that set his clenched fists shaking. For some reason he thought of Diana. Though she stood only a few feet away from him, he visioned her hanging from such a gallows if the dissolute tyrants of this land ever stormed the Lost Caverns. Then Pyatt of Kagan laid a hand on his arm.

"Careful, my friend!" the Lunarian hissed. "Your anger shows on your face, and that is bad. We cannot help that poor girl now. Come!"

They went down into the city, avoiding the broad boulevards and keeping to the narrower streets where the poorer people were. As they passed by the base of one of the high palaces, they came to the body of a girl who lay crushed on the stones and had evidently been thrown or jumped from

one of the upper windows. An aged man stood astride the body, leaning back and shaking his skinny fists at the white and gold bulk of the palace above him.

"Woe be upon the Lords of Gral-Thala!" he screamed in his shrill old voice. "Triple woe upon the tyrants and upon the decadent parasites who fawn upon them. Evil lies in wait for ye, lurking in your white palaces with your guards and your harlots! The hour of doom is not far away! The vengeance of Gorton and Laila may be long delayed, but it comes in the end! Woe to the Lords of Gral-Thala!"

An uneasy, sullen, murmuring crowd was gathered around the ragged old man although they left a broad circle of vacant space around him and the body of his granddaughter. A few troopers of the garrison were making a half-hearted effort to push the crowd back. They were uncomfortable in the face of the unspoken but obvious hatred of the throng. Larry and the others prudently kept to the back of the crowd. Even so, they were near enough to see what happened next.

Silver bells rang sharply, and lackeys called an arrogant summons to clear the way. In the midst of a circle of armed guards, porters carried a swaying gilt litter. On the cushions of the litter rested a man. It was one of the nobles of Gral-Thala, a perfumed degenerate in silken robes with a rouged and painted face. For a moment he stared at the crowds with his arrogantly scornful eyes. Then, as he saw the old man beside the girl's body and heard the curses he was shouting, his patrician face was distorted into a sneering frown.

The noble snarled an order, and one of his guards lifted his electronic rifle. There was a flash of blinding light! A sudden clap of miniature thunder, and a smell of ozone. The man-made lightning bolt struck the old man in the chest and knocked him sprawling across the body of his granddaughter. With a faint smile the noble leaned back on the cushions of the litter and waved languidly to his porters to move on again.

"Let us go, my friends!" Pyatt whispered hoarsely. "We cannot right all the wrongs of Gral-Thala at one stroke, and our mission is the most important thing at the moment."

## XIV

THEY were walking slowly down one of the quiet streets of the city, a quarter where there were few guards and little chance of discovery. Larry noticed that all the windows were equipped with heavy shutters, so that the light could be closed out when the inhabitants of this land desired to sleep. It was a place of unending daylight, always turned toward the sun, where darkness never came. Colton was more interested in the metal rails that ran along the walks on the outside of the buildings.

"My Lord!" he said softly, "These are gold!"

"Of course," Pyatt of Kagan said absently, "Gold is one of the most common metals in Gral-Thala. Our problem is the matter of the radium salts. I happen to know that they are stored in small boxes made of ura-lead, in one of the government storehouses. It would be easier to steal some direct from the mines, but there is no time for that because of the question of proper packing and handling. We must risk everything on a bold attempt to raid the warehouses."

"Suits me," Larry said quietly. Just then Diana gripped him by the arm and jerked him back against the wall of the nearest building.

"Look there!" she hissed.

Another litter was passing along the cross street just ahead of them. This litter went in evident haste, with lackeys swinging whips to clear the path and the passenger bending forward to urge his bearers to greater haste. The man who rode in the litter was Xylon!

The four outlaws stared at each other in grim and ominous surprise. There had been no doubt of the identity of the man who had just passed within a few yards of them.

"But what does *that* mean?" Larry gasped.

"It means that I have been a fool!" Pyatt snarled. "Xylon is evidently no outlaw who came to the caverns to seek shelter, but a spy sent out by the Lords of Gral-Thala. Now I understand the reason for that revolt among the Insect-men! He must have stirred it up in an attempt to kidnap Diana here because of her hold

over those simple creatures. Now the location of the Lost Caverns is at last known to the tyrants, and there will be an attack in force."

"And Xylon knows that we are here in Pandonaria!" Diana exclaimed.

"Which means that all our lives hang by a thread no heavier than a woman's hair! We must get under cover at once! Then we will send word back to the Caverns by secret radio, that they may prepare for an assault. After that we will plan an attempt on the radium salts."

The outlaws of the Lost Caverns had certain confederates within the city, and they now took refuge in the house of a small merchant who was a distant cousin of Pyatt. Larry watched as Pyatt and the merchant crouched over the sending set concealed in a small closet built in the thickness of one of the walls, the arkon-bulbs flashing as they sent the warning to Chotan to be spread to the other caverns. At last Pyatt straightened up.

"At least that is done," he said. "Now we will wait two hours, which will be the time of the Third Meal. There will be few people on the streets, and the warehouse guards will be drowsy, and we will have our best chance."

PYATT and Colton had gone somewhere else in the house, and Larry sat with Diana in a small room whose windows looked out on the green fields beyond the city. The girl had loosened her blue veil so that it hung in soft folds about her chin.

"This is the first time in my life I have been anywhere but in the Caverns and on the waste-land," she said moodily. "This valley of Gral-Thala is a pleasant place."

"You would like Earth even better."

"I suppose I would. Will you take me back to that Earth of yours when you return, Larry?"

"Not until the Gray Death is overcome! I would not want to take any chance of it striking you down."

"Do you love me, Larry?" she asked, without either coquetry or embarrassment.

"I guess I do. Of course, we've only known each other for a few hours—but I guess I do."

"I am glad," she said simply.

The two hours passed, and Pyatt came striding back into the room. They had

given him one of the ray-guns brought ashore from the *Sky Maid*, and he carried it thrust in his girdle close to his hand.

"It is time to go," he said. "We must make our attempt now, win or lose. Where is Colton?"

"I thought he was with you."

"Haven't seen him in two hours!"

A hasty search of the merchant's house and small grounds revealed no trace of the missing officer. Pyatt stood glowering blackly and pulling at his chin.

"I don't like it," he said. "Yet, if the soldiers had taken him, they would have come for us as well."

A different thought was running through Larry's mind, a grim and unpleasant suspicion. He was remembering Colton's past history . . . his general sullenness . . . the greed that he had shown throughout the entire expedition. He was also remembering that he had seen Colton in deep conversation with Xylon a few hours before they had left Chotan.

"I am afraid," he said bitterly, "that Colton has sold us out to Xylon and the Lords of Gral-Thala for promise of reward. We had better get out of this house right away, before . . ."

Larry never finished that sentence. There was a roaring crash, and the door was shattered by the impact of a pair of electronic bolts fired by the soldiers who had crept up to the house. Armored figures came pouring in the door! Others were at the back. Pyatt of Kagan, fighting furiously, went down under press of numbers. Larry managed to get his ray-gun up and fire one blast that crumpled a charging trooper in mid stride, but then half a dozen gripped him and the brief fight was over. They were taken!

## XV

THE hands of the three prisoners were tied behind their backs, and nooses were placed around their necks. Then they were dragged out into the street. The merchant was not taken prisoner at all, simply killed out of hand with the body left lying across his shattered threshold. A thin-lipped, hooked-nosed officer spat in Larry's face as he was led past the body of the dead merchant.

"Not for you will there be such an easy

ending," he sneered. "An example is to be made. You will die before crowds, in the Plaza of the Four Virgins, and the process will be a slow one."

They were surrounded by a double rank of guards as they were led along by the nooses about their necks. All three had been stripped to a loin cloth, and the sun was scorching hot upon Larry's back and shoulders. At least, he thought thankfully, Diana's long black hair gave her some protection. There were jeers and hoots as they were led through the crowded streets, but most of them came from members of the tyrant class and from the few over-dressed and foppish Lunarians who aped their masters. The mass of the people gazed in stony and somehow sympathetic silence.

Into one of the tall white-and-gold palaces of the Lords of Gral-Thala they were taken, and down into stone-walled dungeons far underground. They were placed in a single cell. They stood with their backs against the walls, arms outstretched and wrists lashed to rings set in the stone, able to move little more but their heads. Then, for a while, they were left alone.

"Well," said Larry with grim humor, "here we are."

"So it seems!" Pyatt's voice was rasping and bitter. "I am indeed a fool for ever having allowed Xylon to live in the Cavern of Chotan, in spite of the kind-hearted ruling of the Elders."

"What will they do with us?" Larry asked. Pyatt hesitated, licking his lips and glancing at Diana, but the girl answered for herself.

"We shall probably be skinned alive in the public square, dying slowly under the torture," she said. "It is the favorite punishment of the tyrants for those they particularly hate."

It was a day of triumph for the Lords of Gral-Thala. Xylon's triumphant return with the information that would lead to the wiping out of the always troublesome outlaws of the Lost Caverns, and the capture of the three prisoners, made it a holiday for the ruling class of the valley. They came in hundreds to see the three captives. The famous military leader of the outlaws . . . the girl who was considered a goddess by the primitive Insect-men of the waste-

land . . . the stranger from that distant Earth whence their own ancestors had fled. They came to throng the dungeon corridor and stare in at the trio of captives spread-eagled against the wall of the cell.

Larry watched them through the barred door. For hours on end there were always a few of them in the corridor, staring and jeering. Foppish men in white and gold with their curled hair laden with scent. Haughty and jewel-clad women whose sharp featured faces held even more cruelty than their male companions. Many were attended by Lunarian slave girls whose fettered hands held their trains up from the floor, and the bare backs of the slave girls were usually marked with the crossing red marks of whips. Larry knew, now, that the tales told in the Caverns about the cruelty of the Lords of Gral-Thala had not been exaggerated.

**X**YLON came to see them after a while, opening the cell door and walking in to stand sneering at them with his thumbs hooked in his jeweled girdle.

"Colton sold you out for the promise of wealth and a place in the ranks of our nobles," he said. "It will be a pleasure to watch you die." For a moment he walked over to stand in front of Diana who looked back at him with an expressionless face. "You are not a bad-looking wench. I can take you for one of my slaves if you wish to be agreeable."

"I would rather go with an Insect-man!" the girl said with calm scorn. Xylon shrugged and turned away.

"So be it. At that, it would be a pity to rob the crowd of the pleasure of watching you die."

As near as Larry could judge it, the equivalent of an Earthly day had passed before they were taken out of the cell. They were given an hour to ease their stiffened muscles. Then the guards bound their wrists before them, and by the trailing ends of the ropes led them out of the dungeons and through the streets to a broad open space just at the foot of the inclines that led down from the tunnel by which they had entered the city.

The Plaza of the Four Virgins, named from the four gigantic statues of polished stone that had been placed at its corners in some long ago day before the Invaders

came, was a vast paved space in front of an ancient temple that was now used as a government building. In front of the temple a metal scaffold had been erected with two heavy uprights and a cross-piece. The rulers of Gral-Thala were sprawled in cushioned ease on the steps of the temple, well guarded by their troops, and the floor of the Plaza was filled with the common people of the city. These latter were present in great number, a silent and ominously sullen mass.

The three prisoners were stood in a row on the scaffold. Their hands were raised above their heads, and the ropes made fast to the cross-piece so that they were held tautly erect and motionless. Sharp laughter and occasional jests came from the nobles and their women clustered on the steps, but as Larry looked out over the crowd in the Plaza he saw faces that were grim and intent. The threat of the electronic rifles of the guards would keep the unarmed mob from trying to aid the prisoners, but there was no doubt where their sympathies lay.

Glancing up at the tryants grouped on the temple steps, Larry suddenly saw Colton. The former second officer of the *Sky Maid* now wore the white and gold robes of a noble of Gral-Thala. Xylon kept his promises! Colton flushed uncomfortably when his glance met Larry's grim stare, quickly turning his eyes away. He looked uncomfortable and ill-at-ease. Larry glanced at him again a few minutes later and saw Colton staring at Diana's bound and motionless form with definite misery in his eyes.

One of the nobles stepped to the front and began to address the crowd. Shriill yells and catcalls drowned his words. The guards raged, but the men in the front ranks of the mob were discreetly silent and they could not reach or identify the culprits in the ranks behind. Many of the nobles were muttering nervously among themselves, showing definite signs of fear.

"There was never a scene like this in Pandonaria before!" Pyatt of Kagan exulted from where he was bound beside Larry. "We may die, but our death is likely to stir the people to such a pitch that the revolt will soon come!"

Xylon, for all his faults, was made of sterner stuff than most of his fellow nobles. He sneered down at the muttering

crowd, then signed to the officer commanding the guards.

"Pay no attention to the dogs," he commanded sharply. "Give these three a taste of the whip before the flayers rip the skins from their bodies. Begin with the girl."

A heavy-featured man in a black tunic stepped up to Diana, pulling the lash of a heavy whip through his hands to test its suppleness. Before he could strike there came a sudden interruption. A small car had been speeding down the incline from the tunnel entrance and now a gilded officer of the invaders leaped out and came running across the Plaza.

"Great news, oh Xylon and nobles of Gral-Thala!" he shouted. "One of our patrols has captured a great force of outlaw warriors and their insect allies, who were moving in to raid our nearer caves. Some more Earthlings are with them!"

"Good, by Gorton!" exulted Xylon. "We will delay the execution of these three till the others are here to see it."

Larry's last hope was gone. He had remembered Ripon's promise to come after them if they had not returned quickly, and in the back of his mind had been the thought that the doughty scientist might yet accomplish a rescue in some way. Now that hope had vanished. He sighed, and beside him Diana sagged visibly in her bonds.

"Guess it's the end," she said. "Good bye, Larry!"

## XVI

FROM where he stood on the scaffold, Larry could see a number of the big transport cars coming down the incline. They were crowded with prisoners and guards, and he caught the gleam of the hard brown shells of Insect-men. Once unloaded from the cars, they all formed up in columns and came quickly across the Plaza. Behind the front rank of guards Larry saw Ripon, and some of the men from the *Sky Maid*, and many whom he recognized as leaders among the Lunarians of the Lost Caverns.

It was all over now. The prisoners trudged along like beaten men, utterly disheartened although they were but thinly guarded. The nobles grouped on the temple steps were laughing loudly, all their

nervousness of a moment ago gone before the reassurance of this victory. Then, as the prisoners were halted in the Plaza directly before the double line of soldiers that guarded the temple, an officer beside Xylon leaned forward to point down at the commander of the patrol that was bringing in the prisoners.

"That man wears the insignia of an Ensign of the first rank," he shouted, "but there is no such man in the ranks of our officers! There is treachery here!"

Before the man's words had died away, Crispin Gillingwater Ripon had whipped a ray-gun out from under his cloak and smashed the officer's chest into a charred pulp with the deadly blast of the rays.

In an instant the Plaza was a wild turmoil. The pretended prisoners drew their hidden weapons. Those who had been masquerading as guards, using the armor they had taken from the soldiers they surprised and overwhelmed when they stormed the tunnel entrance, threw the uniforms aside and charged into the fight. The rippling crashes of the electronic guns rang out again and again, the murky flashes of the Earthmen's death rays stabbed into the fray, and a clicking horde of Insect-men charged home with their spiked clubs swinging.

For the first few moments the fighting centered around the scaffold. Xylon led a charged of picked men down to seize and keep the three prisoners bound there, Ripon came storming through to effect a rescue. When the mêlée was over, Larry and Pyatt were free and Xylon had retreated back to the temple steps, but Diana had disappeared.

"We got the rest of the crew from the *Sky Maid* and all the men we could collect at Chotan and crept up to the tunnel mouth," Ripon panted as he thrust a ray-gun into Larry's hand. "We took the guards by surprise and killed them before they could warn the valley behind."

It had been a daring raid, and at first its sheer audacity had carried it near to complete victory. Now the superior numbers of the guards were beginning to tell, and more of the troops of Gral-Thala came pounding up at the double. The crash of the electronic guns became a steady roar, and bodies were thickly strewn about the blood-smeared surface of the Plaza of the

Four Virgins. Then, with a long-drawn and sullen shout, the mass of watching Lunarians flung themselves on the soldiery. Hundreds died, but the others tore the guards to pieces with their naked hands and then snatched up their weapons. The people of Gral-Thala had risen against their oppressors at last!

WITH the uprising of the people, the battle ceased to be a fight and became a massacre. The troops were selling their lives as dearly as they could, but thousands more citizens carrying improvised weapons were pouring in from every street and the thing was only a matter of time. Then, in the rear of the panic stricken mass of nobles who were fleeing into the temple to make a last stand, while the vengeful pack bayed at their heels. Larry suddenly saw Xylon!

The tyrant was standing beside one of the great stone columns that supported the portico of the temple. He held the half naked body of Diana before him as a shield. The girl's hands were still tied and she could not pull away. A swarm of Insect-men, who were bounding up the temple steps, halted as they saw Xylon hold an electronic pistol to the head of their goddess.

"Keep back or she dies!" he shouted. "She is hostage for our safety!"

Larry lifted his ray-gun, and then lowered it again with a groan. He dared not shoot with Diana's struggling body in the way. Nor had he any doubt that Xylon would kill the girl without compunction if attacked. Xylon began to edge back toward the temple door. Larry still stood indecisive, the others seemed frozen in their places. Then another white-and-gold figure darted out from the temple behind Xylon. The renegade Colton twisted the gun from Xylon's hand!

The thing was over in an instant. Xylon released Diana and turned on Colton with an oath, and the girl instantly dropped to the ground. Steel flickered in the sunlight. Xylon drove a long knife home between Colton's ribs, but before he could dart away Larry's ready ray-gun struck him

down with its blast. His quivering body rolled slowly down the steps till the Insect-men reached it and literally tore it into bloody bits.

## XVII

THE dying Colton was sinking fast. His face was gray as he looked up with a faint smile at the others who were grouped around him.

"I never was much good," he said faintly. "Guess it just wasn't in the blood. Gold always led me into twisted paths, and I couldn't resist Xylon's offer. But it did something to me when I saw the way those devils were going to torture the girl. Well—I guess I paid my debt at the end."

"You've paid it—and you'll live to go back to Earth with us," Larry said. Colton shook his head, his eyes glazing.

"Don't try to kid me. I'm cashing in my checks," he said—and died.

Now that it was all over, Larry felt very tired. He put one arm around Diana, and leaned back against the base of the column. There was still some intermittent fighting going on where mobs of vengeful Lunarians had cornered some of their oppressors, but the victory was won. Ripon looked about at the carnage with a satisfied smile and them sheathed his ray-gun.

"It was a good fight!" he said. "I haven't had as much fun since the time I wrecked a saloon in Port Mahon. Now, young feller, you just take care of the lady here while I take a squad and get the radium salts from the store-house."

"And the *Sky Maid*?" Larry asked.

"That sour-puss Masterson has been standing over the men with a ray-gun in one hand and my last jug of rum in the other ever since you left. All the repairs are finished. We start back to Earth as soon as we can get our cargo aboard."

"Then the people of your planet will be saved?" Diana asked.

"They will be saved. And as soon as the Gray Death is checked I'll come back for you. Then the Moon will have to get along without its Goddess for a while."

"I'll be waiting," she said.

# THE GIRL FROM INFINITE SMALLNESS

By RAY CUMMINGS

**Into a different space-sphere bursts Lea, terrified Princess of the microcosmic Heanas, searching for an earthling champion. For the vicious Taroh had thieved the secret of transcendant growth, and he's marching to crush the gentle sub-world of Helos.**

**Y**OUNG George Carter had always particularly liked the little rock garden which lay on the declivity behind his home. His mother, now dead, had designed and planted it with loving care. In the spring, and particularly on hot summer evenings when the moonlight patched the garden with silver, it was his favorite spot, the place where he liked to sit alone, smoking and dreaming.

Despite his intention of following in his father's footsteps and becoming a scientist, there was incongruously much of the dreamer, the romanticist, in young George Carter. At nineteen now, six feet tall, he was lean and rangy, with a rugged, handsome face, dark eyes and unruly, longish black hair. Admiring college girls had sometimes told him that he was a combination of Abe Lincoln and Lord Byron. That pleased him, though in his heart he knew it really wasn't very important.

He was finished with his studies now, ready for the world of achievement. His father, a retired Professor of Ethnology, had arranged the financing of an exploring expedition. Alice—George's twin sister, who from birth had been blind—was going to visit distant relatives. George and his father would go to central Asia. Perhaps they would find some Neanderthal skeletons, crumbling bones that could be pieced together thrillingly to throw more light upon the nature of our savage ancestors of a few million years ago.

It was an exciting prospect to young Carter. All the spirit of adventurous youth stirred within him at the thought of it. But nevertheless, this summer more than ever, when the night breeze rustled the leaves and the moonlight patched his mother's little rock garden, he found himself

liking to lie out there alone, smoking and vaguely dreaming of things less remote than Asiatic Neanderthal skeletons of a million years ago.

Undoubtedly—this particular July evening—young Carter drowsed off into complete unconsciousness, with his long lanky figure sprawled in the chair. He was awakened by a faint vague sound so abnormal to the somnolent little garden that at once it snapped him into alertness. It sounded like a faint cry—a little gasp of human fear. He sat up, startled, but the sound was gone. There seemed nothing here but the patches of moonlight and the dim outlines of the garden. . . . Then Carter sucked in his breath and tensed, with his hands gripping the sides of his canvas chair. There was a girl standing off there between the sundial and the distant hedge—a girl smaller than Alice, with the moonlight shining on the pale fabric of her dress that hung from her shoulders to above her knees. A gray-blue cord crossed to divide her breasts, encircled her slim waist and hung with tassels down one side to her knees. He saw her face, with hair streaming down to frame it—a face that stared at him with terror.

"Well," he murmured. "Good Heavens, where did you come from?"

He jumped to his feet. Again she gave the little cry of fear, and like a faun darted backward until the hedge stopped her. She had come into a brighter patch of moonlight now, and the sight made him gasp. Her short tasseled robe was torn and soiled. Her bare legs were scratched and splotted with blood that had dried. On her feet, buskins tied with thongs about her ankles were ragged, dirty and blood-stained. Her whole aspect suggested an





arduous, perhaps desperate journey.

Thoughts are instant things. For that moment he stared, transfixed; and like a trapped little animal she gazed back at him. He saw that she was young, fifteen or sixteen perhaps. A girl in a fancy dress costume, who had run a long way and was cowering here in terror. But then he saw her pale-gold hair, almost silvery in the moonlight; the flesh of her neck and arms and face, queerly seeming to glow, as though opalescent—saw her face of exquisite, but very strange beauty. Oriental? He knew it was not that. And all his sudden thoughts of rationality were stricken from him with the startled idea that this girl could belong to no race that had ever been known on Earth. Idiotic thought! But he could not thrust it away.

He was advancing upon her now. "Who the devil are you?" he demanded. "How did you get in here? What's happened to you?"

She was trembling as a faun might stand its ground and tremble, so that now he was beside her, with her face at his shoulder as she stared up at him. Then she was murmuring something, in a language of soft limpid syllables. A language of Earth? Certainly it didn't seem so. She was breathing hard; her whole aspect showed exhaustion.

"You're all in," he murmured. "Good Heavens, you look as though you'd walked from California and climbed half a dozen mountains."

Idiotic words, especially as obviously she couldn't understand them. His hand went to her shoulder. Perhaps she was badly hurt. . . . He must get her into the house. . . .

But at his touch she twitched loose. She was staring past him now to where the moonlight glistened on the rippling little lily pool. Then she darted away; and at the pool knelt down, plunging her face, drinking deeply, greedily as one drinks who has been much too long without water. . . .

IT was several weeks before Professor Carter, Alice and George had any clear idea of who the strange, weirdly beautiful young girl might be, or where she had come from. Her name, which almost at once she was able to indicate to them, sounded as though it might be Lea—a

limpid syllable as near that as they could determine. Professor Carter had told no one in the quiet little New England village about her. For the first few days, vaguely it had seemed that from some distant place a hue and cry would be raised for her; news that such a girl had escaped from some asylum, circus or Heaven knows what.

But nothing developed. No such girl seemed missing. It confirmed George and his father's own conviction; incredibly this timid, new little inmate of the prosaic Carter household was of a race so far unknown.

"Why, look at her, George," Professor Carter had exclaimed that first evening. "That complexion, creamy, ivory-tinted—perfect for an earth-girl. But don't you see that glow of opalescence in it? God, that's weird, unnatural, unexplainable. And look at the shape of her skull—not our shape. Not Neanderthal. I'd call it perhaps more in the line of Cro-Magnon. Yet hardly that either. My guess is that the skeleton formation, particularly the skull, certainly in many ways represents a development different from ours."

Professor Carter was scientifically enthusiastic, amazed and thrilled by this mysterious specimen of living young female so miraculously here for him to study. George's father was a stocky, thick-set man of nearly sixty, square-rigged like a brig. His face was solid, heavily lined from almost a constant habit of grimness. He had a sunburned baldspot with a fringe of iron-gray hair. There was nothing of the dreamer, the romanticist in the practical scientific nature of Professor Carter—save that to him, everything scientific was the essence of romance. His deep-set gray eyes were sparkling with earnestness as he regarded the queerly beautiful little Lea.

"A primitive race, George. And yet, look at her expression. Those delicately chiseled features. She has artistic feeling—a mentality different from ours, but perhaps in some ways even more advanced."

To young Carter, the classification was repugnant, as though this frightened, wild little creature were a bug under a microscope. And Alice evidently felt the same.

"Father, stop it!" she exclaimed. "Don't boom at her like that. She's still too frightened."

George's blind sister was slender, brown-haired. Her face had a gentle, wistful beauty, enhanced into pathos by the blankness of her pale-brown eyes. Here in her own home where she had lived all her sightless life, she could move with almost normal freedom. It was she who took care of Lea at first. But as the days passed into weeks the strange little visitor, alert of mentality, always with a whimsical smile, began taking care of the blind girl. Lea's language of soft, weird syllables defied Professor Carter's classification. He and George could do nothing with it. But from the first, with extraordinary concentration and abnormal aptitude, at once Lea began learning English. That her mentality was different, and in this respect certainly far superior to their own, immediately became apparent. With amazing rapidity she memorized and understood the words and phrases with which patiently they drilled her. With Alice as her constant companion, she made an immediate effort to fit into what was for her, the strangeness of their household. Often she would laugh with what obviously was a keen sense of whimsical humor—a little rippling rill of girlish laughter. . . .

The knowledge of who she was and where she had come from, of necessity was imparted gradually to the still incredulous Carters. Obviously now she was struggling with their language with the desire to tell them. There was still another mystery about her which that very first evening, Alice had discovered. Beneath one of her armpits, held by a strap around her body, there was a small vial, seemingly of some tough vegetable fiber. She had wildly, vehemently resisted everyone's effort to touch it; she would never let it leave her person.

Then at last came her ability to make them really understand that she had come from a strange world of infinite smallness. A world so tiny that it was vastly beyond the reach of any microscope. A world in an atom.

"I watch—very careful as I grow large," she said. "I can show you now from where I come." Then she led them, amazed and, of course, still incredulous, out into the garden. At the broken old sundial she indicated to them its metal pointer, near

the end of which there was a tiny abrasion.

"From there," she insisted. "I notice it well when I come. You wait—I tell to you soon—when the English for me get better."

To young Carter who watched her always with a mixture of struggling emotions which he could not himself understand, it seemed that a shadow crossed her expressive little face as she showed them the spot on the green-bronzed aged pointer of the old sundial. A single atom, down there in the metal, housed her world. She was worried about her people. . . .

Amazing infinity of smallness! As a scientist, young Carter had been reared upon the contemplation of how little one can really know of the multiplicity of things which exist in the Universe. The remoteness of inter-stellar space to him had always been awesome. And here was an opposite remoteness. An infinity of smallness. . . .

Lea's English was sometimes quaint, but adequate to her task, that evening when in detail she told them. . . .

MY people—Lea said—live in the mountains and in the forests around the big lake. The main city, it is called Helos. We are the Heanas, most civilized people in our world. . . .

It was a strange picture which the girl evoked of her world within an atom of the sundial pointer. From a shimmering, luminescent lake in a region of soft-glowing twilight, hills of a strange blue-gray vegetation rose in great undulating terraces toward the distant mountains. The Heanas were a peaceful people. Nature had always been kind; food was readily grown; the people's few wants always had been easily supplied. Crime among them had always been very little. But there was some, of course—crimes of fundamental motive; love, hate, jealousy, cupidity, revenge. Wherever humans exist, such crimes are inevitable.

It happened that when Lea was just emerging from childhood—perhaps a thousand times of sleep ago—there was a man in Helos named Taroh. He had been what might be called a chemist—his work created substances which kept the fields fertile so that foods might easily and swiftly be grown. Neither Lea nor her father—

who was ruler of the city of Helos—liked this Taroh. And shortly after that, the fellow was caught and convicted of killing another man. For punishment he was banished from the land of the Heanas—sent to live forever in the region of darkness beyond the mountains, in the country of the Malobs, as it was called.

For a thousand times of sleep, little was heard in Helos of this Taroh. But it was known that he had risen to be a ruler of the colony of banished criminals like himself; that he had organized them, and organized the savage tribe of Malobs—men who lived in caves or roamed the black distant forests and killed the lurking animals for food.

"Like our Neanderthals," Professor Carter interjected, when Lea had further described to them the savage, primitive Malobs.

**I**N Helos they were beginning to fear that Taroh might have become a menace. Occasional visitors to banished relatives in the Malob colony brought darkling hints back to Helos that Taroh was promising to have his revenge; that some day there would be a war like the ancient wars; the exiles and the Malobs would be victorious and they would rule and enjoy the better lands and better climates which the Heanas now were ruling. It had frightened Lea's father and his counselors. Secretly they had selected a young Heana named Artone, who volunteered to pretend that he was convicted of a crime and banished; and thus go and as a spy join Taroh to find out what was going on. This was known to Lea. She liked Artone—he was young, handsome and courageous. She feared for him; his mission was dangerous.

Then, during one of the times of sleep, Artone had returned to Helos, riding one of the swift iguaras. Lea had met him, before he met anyone else in Helos. And his news was terrifying. Even before Taroh had been banished—Artone had learned—he had been experimenting with a diabolical, dangerous drug. It was finished now. A drug which effected the growth of living cell-organisms. Young Artone had been clever. He had gained Taroh's confidence, so that one night the drunken Taroh and an evil woman who called her-

self Tara after him, gloatingly told Artone all about it.

Lea had only partially understood the depth of scientific principles involved. To enlarge the bodily size of a living human, for instance, Taroh had said, engaged no deeper problem than does a slight expansion of tissue—or the rapid growth of a single cell—except that it must be carried farther. The problem was to find a combination of chemicals, sufficiently unharmed to life, that would so act upon the cells as to cause an increase of their bulk without changing their shape—a uniform proportionate rate of growth of each cell, so that the body shape would not be altered.

Taroh, experimenting with simple living organisms, had progressed to insects, and then to himself. He had found, too, that any object of animal or vegetable cell structure which is held in close physical contact with the enlarging body, likewise would be expanded, because they would be within the natural aura of magnetic field with which every living thing is surrounded. Thus a man's garments, his weapons closely held against him—unless they were mineral—would grow large with him.

"And Taroh planned to take this drug?" George Carter exclaimed. "And grow large? A man a hundred feet tall perhaps—so that he could come and devastate your city of Helos? Why of course he could do that!"

It had been Taroh's boasted intention. But Lea, hearing of it from the breathless Artone, had ridden back at once with Artone on the huge iguara. It had pleased and flattered the drunken Taroh that the girl, out of attraction for him, had come to join him, so that Lea had been able to learn from him where he kept the diabolical drug.

"You did that?" Professor Carter exploded, "Look here, young woman, you mean to say on a thing of importance like that you didn't tell your father and his counselors? You dared take the thing into your own hands?"

Lea's slant eyes beneath her long lashes flung him a sidewise glance; her lips twisted into a whimsical smile.

"It could be that there are some things," she said demurely, "where a woman's wit is better than the strength of a man's arms." And she added slyly, "You are

much like my father, Professor Carter."

She had gotten the drug. And with it, upon the verge of being trapped, she had no recourse but to take the drug herself, and by growing gigantic, escape from Taroh. The drug at first had blurred her senses. That, and her terror, had sent her reeling out into the faintly luminous darkness of the Malob country. Quite evidently she had taken far more of the drug than she planned. Half conscious, she had been aware of the dwindling rocky landscape—gullies closing in upon her so that she had to draw her expanding body upward or its bulk in the apparently shrinking space would have crushed her.

IT had been a weird and ghastly journey to the terrified Lea. Professor Carter, George and Alice sat tense, amazed as they tried to visualize what so earnestly she was describing. Then at last the dose of the drug she had taken wore off. She had desperately climbed from a shrinking valley into a new vista of barren rocky waste. Exhausted, she had slept. Then she was cold, hungry and thirsty. For hours and for miles she had wandered over the gigantic, empty, naked terrain of metallic rocks. Without food or water, she knew she would die. There was nothing she could do save to take more of the drug, with the monstrous landscape again shrinking until at last there was different air, different light.

She emerged finally, with other, decreasing doses of the drug which now she had learned to regulate—emerged upon the pointer of the Carter sundial. And growing still larger, had been able to drop to the surface of the sundial itself, and then with more growth, to the ground. She was in the Carter garden, where presently the last tiny taste of the drug wore off. With size unchanging she stood terrified and amazed in the strange silver and black world—and then she had seen the strange-looking man who was George Carter, lying in his chair. . . .

For a moment the Carters were silent as Lea ended her amazing narrative. It seemed incredible, but they had to believe it; the girl was so earnest; her words carried such a wealth of corroborating detail. It made them realize anew what a vast multiplicity of human life must be hidden

away beyond our ken in the Universe! . . . Later that evening, George and his father discussed it.

"Naturally the human life within atoms of our own earth has developed in our own image," Professor Carter was saying. "The same life-source—same general lines of evolution. A different environment—that, and a different size. But still fundamentally the same. Why, I'll be able to lecture on this, George. That girl Lea—she can appear with me." He slapped George enthusiastically on the back. "This will be a big thing for us, boy. We'll be world famous, once we make it known."

"Will we?" Young Carter sat with his gaze focused far through the walls of the living room—gazing out to the conjured vision of a world of Heanas, and savage Malobs. The lamplit living room here was silent. Alice had gone to bed. Lea had retired to her room up there also.

"I was thinking," George said. "That fellow Taroh—Lea stole his drug, but he can make more. Why not? Maybe by now that's what he's done. To trample gigantic, upon Lea's people—to wreck that little city—"

It seemed that there was a faint noise at the top of the hall stairs. George and his father glanced up inquiringly, then decided that it was nothing.

"We must get the rest of that enlarging drug away from her," Professor Carter said. "I didn't want to tackle her tonight—she's been so unreasonable about that package under her arm. We'll get it, George, I'll demonstrate it to the scientific societies to prove our statements, and then, good God, it must be destroyed. Too damn dangerous. Why, if a thing like that fell into the wrong hands here, it could devastate the world!"

But George was thinking only of poor little Lea. Marooned here. She was worried about her people, of course. . . . After Professor Carter had gone to bed that night, for a long time George sat alone in the sitting room, pondering. To his father the fate of that tiny world was only an interesting scientific thesis. He realized that a billion billion other atomic worlds might be struggling, unseen, inaccessible to us. . . .

Upon impulse, young Carter suddenly left the sitting room and went quietly up-

stairs. Very gently he knocked on Lea's door.

"Lea? You asleep?"

"Oh—that is you, George? Come in."

Clad in a pair of Alice's blue pajamas, Lea was sitting on the bed—slim little figure with the lamplight softly painting her, glinting in her pale-gold hair with tints of burnished silver. Her hair was streaming down over her shoulders; it framed her face on which now a shadow of terror had gathered.

"You heard what I mentioned to father," George said. "About Taroh maybe making more of the drug?"

"Yes. That I did. Oh, George—I thought what I did for my world was the best."

Contrition was upon her. "It was," he said hastily. He had closed the door behind him; he lowered his voice. "Lea, father wants to get that drug away from you and destroy it. But I was thinking—chemists here, analyzing it, might be able to create its reverse."

She stared. "I mean," he added earnestly, "I don't want to abandon your world, Lea. Not by a jugful I don't. If a drug can be made to increase bodily growth, why couldn't one be made to diminish it? I don't care what father says, I'm going to get the best chemists in the country to try and analyze it—try and create its opposite."

"Your father—and the big men of science—they would never allow that," she said. "I heard your father say that this enlarging drug, it could devastate your world. He is right. And so could one that made people smaller, so that they would vanish forever into smallness. Is that not so, George?"

"I don't care," he asserted. "I'll take a chance. I'll be careful what chemists I give it to. And father needn't know what I'm going to do anyway. Let's see the drug."

She opened the neck of her pajama top; and produced a flat brown box, of a strange hard fiber which undoubtedly was vegetable. Within it were two small vials of the same material.

"This one I used," she said. "There is some of the drug here left." Opening it, she showed him a number of tiny white pellets. A luminous phosphorescence

seemed to stream up from them when they were held in shadow. "The dose I first took was three," she added. "But at the journey end, no more than did I touch one to the tip of my tongue."

THE other vial, identical in size, shape and color, was sealed with a wax-like gum. George opened it. They stared; Lea faintly gasped as he poured the tiny pellets out into his palm. They were not white like the others, but a deep violet, with the same luminescence seeming to stream up from them.

"Why, what is that?" Lea murmured. "I thought that all the drug was the same."

"But Taroh maybe figured he wouldn't want to stay gigantic," George exclaimed with rising excitement. "Why not? Maybe our work is all done for us, Lea."

Were these luminescent violet pellets a diminishing drug? . . . A fly was walking on the white counterpane of Lea's bed. Carter watched it as it flew and landed on the tabletop under the lamp.

"Don't move, Lea," he murmured. "I'll see if I can get that fly to eat some." He laid one of the violet pellets in the circle of lamplight. Breathlessly he and the girl watched. Perhaps the violet luminescence carried an alluring smell, for presently the fly crawled to the pellet.

"It did! It ate some, Lea! Watch it now!"

The fly was standing motionless. For a breathless instant fear stabbed into Carter. Suppose this were the enlarging drug, the same as the other save a different color. That fly, getting large, might dart away. In a moment it might be too large to kill, still growing, it would burst the room, wreck the house. . . . With the flash of terrified thoughts, Carter raised his hand to try and kill the motionless insect. But he stopped.

"Look! It is smaller!" Lea murmured.

With wings still folded it was crawling in a wavering little circle near the pellet. And visibly it was diminishing in size. Already the tiny pellet seemed gigantic beside it. Silently Lea and Carter stared. The fly was a tiny black midge now, swiftly crawling, but moving so slowly on the polished tabletop.

"Can you still see it, Lea?" Carter blinked; bent down. It seemed that the

insect already was beyond his sight.

"Yes. I see it."

And then it had vanished. Not gone. They knew it was still there; dwindling; soon it would be beyond the reach of any microscope. . . .

For a moment, in the silent little bedroom, Carter and the girl stared at each other, overwhelmed by the momentousness of their discovery.

"You want to go back to your own world, Lea?" he murmured at last. "You can do it now—with this."

"Yes—yes! That is what I shall do." Her eyes were shining. Her whole little figure was trembling. Swiftly she gathered up the pellets, replaced them in the vial. "Your father shall have no chance to destroy them," she declared defiantly. "They are mine, not his."

"If you go, I'm going with you," Carter exclaimed suddenly. His heart was pounding; a band seemed binding his chest. There is no one who can face the Unknown without a thrill of excitement, and fear.

"And leave this your world?" she murmured. "Your father and sister—they who love you just as my people love me—"

"I can come back to them. The journey—"

"The journey, it can be very long and very dangerous—"

"Not so dangerous for me as for you, Lea." He seized her by her slender shoulders and stared earnestly down into her eyes. "Look here, do you want me to come?" he demanded. "Not because I can help you—I don't mean only that. Do you want me to come?"

For an instant it seemed that in the limpid depths of her eyes a mist was gathering. Then her face turned whimsical; her mouth twisted into a little smile as she cocked her head and gazed at him slantwise from behind lowered lashes.

"That is for you to think for yourself," she murmured. "I could not stop you coming if I would. Is that not so?"

"It damn sure is," he agreed. Again he lowered his voice, with a swift glance at the bedroom door. "I don't think I'll say anything about this to father and Alice," he added softly. "Just leave them a message that I'll be right back. No use starting anything, you know."

"And you will come back soon to them?"

You will thank them for that they have both been so very kind to me here?"

"Sure I will. Why, Lea, we're not going far. Only into the garden, to the sundial's pointer. Why, if you look at it like that, we're not going maybe even an eighth of an inch beneath the surface of that metal pointer!"

He met Lea, a short time later, out in the moonlit garden. They had come furtively down through the silent house. He was wearing his bathing suit, with rubber-soled sneakers on his feet from which he had removed the metal eyelets. Lea was dressed as he had first seen her, in her short gray-blue ragged little garment. The same wild, strange little girl of another world—and now he stared with his heart racing, and he put his hands on her shoulders.

"I'm glad you're not getting away from me," he said unsteadily.

"We should stand by the sundial," she murmured. "We take the drug now?"

"All right," he agreed. They had divided the two drugs, so that each of them carried a vial of both violet and white pellets. "Now listen carefully, Lea," he directed. "Above everything we must keep together. Not only in space—keep close beside each other, I mean—but we must be sure and keep together in size also. We must always take identical amounts of the drug. And take them at identical times."

"That I understand." She had made this trip before; outwardly at least, she was far less excited than himself. "One pellet first, you think?"

"Yes. Until—until we see what happens." He took one of the luminous violet pellets in his palm. A pungent aromatic odor wafted up from it. "Ready, Lea?"

He put the pellet into his mouth and hastily swallowed it. He was conscious of a sickish sweet taste; a burning constriction of his mouth and throat. Then his senses reeled with a dizzying swoop.

HE and Lea were clinging together; he felt himself staggering a little. He opened his eyes. The patched black and silver scene of the rock garden was blurred; swaying. Then his sight clarified. The scene steadied. But then he realized that everything was moving—the dim trees, the garden hedge, the little paths and rocks, all very slowly expanding, heightening,

widening. And he felt the movement under his feet. With a soft, crawling, shifting, the ground was moving outward, expanding under the soles of his shoes. It drew his feet slowly apart, so that he had to take a staggering step to readjust them.

"Heavens, Lea—it's weird."

She steadied him. "It will seem not so bad in a moment."

One may almost get used to anything. His senses presently were steady. And he knew that all the motion he was seeing was only an optical effect. Nothing was changing save himself and Lea as they dwindled. Amazing scene! The motion of the landscape had accelerated now—soundless expansion of everything within his vision. Only Lea beside him remained seemingly unchanged. To each of us, himself is the center of the Universe. Always throughout all the weird journey, Carter conceived himself his normal six foot height—and all the world around him seemed getting larger.

He had taken a step away from Lea on the unsteady ground. Awed, he stood gazing at the crawling movement of the expanding garden. The trees near at hand already had drawn back; their interlocking branches were strangely high over his head. Beyond a line of huge mossy rocks, forty feet away now when it should have been twenty, he could see the moonlit line of giant hedge. To the left, the moonlight glinted on a great pool of rippling water, with tremendous lily pads and a great line of mossy boulders along the bank—a line which was shifting backward and expanding upward, steadily, as he stared.

Gigantic garden. Why, he could hardly see across it now. A forest of giant trees towered into the sky near its distant lower end.

"George! The sundial!" He felt Lea tugging at him. "We must go—"

"Good Heavens, we've got to climb up there," he gasped. He seized her hand; ran with her. The rocky garden path was broad as a road. The flaring top of the sundial was seven or eight feet above the ground when they got there. Frantically he lifted her up and leaped after her. She pulled at him; tumbled him over the brink. Panting, they lay on the great circular spread of uneven concrete, with the brink down to the moonlit ground beyond its

curving edge, close beside them. Beneath him he could feel the concrete turning rougher and shifting outward in all directions. There were sharp jagged points on it now. Then he stared down over the edge. It was an astonishing abyss, sixty feet at least, down to a spread of moonlit rippled lake, which was the lily pool!

He had helped Lea to her feet when abruptly they thought of the sundial pointer. In the center of the circular moonlit spread of concrete the metal pointer stood gleaming, fifty feet away. It was a triangle of metal standing on edge, with its top sloping steeply upward—a slope perhaps thirty feet long now, up to an apex ten feet high. Swiftly they walked toward it. Within a moment, around them was a huge porous plain of jagged rocks gleaming with moonlight. The circular lip of the abyss everywhere was receding. There was only a silvery sheen of darkness beyond it now. Overhead, far up, a single gigantic tree branch still was visible, blurred in the moonlight.

**T**HEN they reached the sundial pointer. Its apex towered twenty feet high now; the lower end of its upper sloping edge already was a foot or two above the ragged, porous ground. Carter, standing at the end of the pointer which in another moment was waist high, gazed up a six-foot wide slope of metal which rose steeply into the moonlight. Ten feet or so up the slope there was a depression like a little gully gouged out of the metallic rock.

"That is the place," Lea said.

"All right. We'd better get up there at once."

He lifted her up to the bottom of the slope. Together, up a great jagged expanding ramp which presently was twenty feet wide, arduously they climbed upward. Inexorable expansion! New spaces every moment were opening up beneath their feet. A tiny rift in the jagged metal ground, in a moment was a little gully. Metal stones were apparent now, and tiny pits into which one might thrust a finger. The edge of the slope chanced to be beside Carter; and he gazed down from here on the top of the pointer—down to the concrete circular top of the sundial. Hundreds of feet down there, a vast, shining moonlit surface spread out now to the blurred hori-



zon! Huge pits, gullies, ravines were inky black. On the jagged spires and little butte-tops the moonlight was molten silver. It was a weird, naked scene of gray and yellow-white rocks, fantastic as a Lunar landscape!

Then just for a moment, with mental viewpoint changed, Carter envisaged the actuality. How big, compared to his original six-foot stature, was he now? A sixteenth of an inch perhaps? If his father were here in the garden, bending close over the sundial pointer with a light, he might still be able to see him and the girl as they struggled up the sloping narrow top edge of the sundial pointer!

Amazing how nothing is absolute, but wholly comparative to something else! He had told Lea that they were not going very far! Only from the house to the sundial in the garden. But, based on his present size, his father and Alice off there in the house now, were at least sixty or seventy miles away!

"This is the valley," Lea panted. "I can recognize now. It almost closed upon me as I grew large. I can remember climbing up to here."

The edges of the giant upward slope had drawn away, so that with tumbled boulders intervening, Carter could no longer see them. He and Lea were in a depression, like a huge cauldron with its scooped-out bottom almost level—a place a hundred feet in diameter. Steadily the crawling expansion of all the scene continued. It seemed a uniform rate of expansion now.

"That pellet lasts a long time, Lea." He tried to grin at her. "Don't you suppose its effect is about over?"

"Oh, no! There is a great distance yet."

Distance; size! Meaningless terms. He and Lea—as his father would view it—were not going very far in terms of distance! Just two tiny creatures, almost too small to be seen, struggling on the one-eighth-inch-thick top of the sundial pointer!

"You say we go into a valley?" he suddenly demanded. "I don't see any valley."

"This one," the girl said.

A few feet from them there was a rift, like a little crescent slash. A foot wide and twice as deep, it began here and curved off into the distance. But presently it was

a gully—a ragged, curving little canyon fifty feet wide with broken walls that towered above them as they went into it.

"I climbed out from here," Lea said. "I am sure it was just about here where nearly I was crushed. But it looks so very different now." She was puzzled as she gazed about them—gazed at what now was a broad, curving valley with great mountainous sides towering up into the luminous darkness overhead.

"Look here," he said, "I'm getting the hang of this. The secret is not to wait until you're too small before going anywhere. Which way next?"

She was still puzzled. And then she brightened. "Why, it is right here. I see it now."

It was a steeply descending little chasm. It had been a mere crack a moment ago so that she had not recognized it. Now it was a ten-foot rift, with a bottom smooth as black marble—a slide steeply descending into darkness.

Carter peered dubiously. "How far down is it?"

"Not far. I was so big, I jumped up just as these walls almost closed upon me."

He and the girl were very much smaller than that now. They lay down, feet first, at the top of the slide. For a moment he hesitated. How far down would it be for them in this size? But every moment of hesitation was making that worse!

"All right, Lea. Here we go."

Half sliding, half climbing, they started. The smooth, marble-like slide had roughened. Little stones began sliding with them. "Easy!" he gasped. "Don't go too fast!"

He clutched her; they slid together a dozen feet; wildly scrambled to a stop. Then Lea lost her foothold. He gripped at her, and lost his own. Then they were bumping, rolling with a clatter of loosened stones coming after them. And then the terrified Carter was aware of a fall. And a rock struck his head with a bursting roar of light as his senses slid off into the soundlessness of oblivion. . . .

HE came to himself with the knowledge that Lea was holding him, kneeling beside him in a luminous darkness. "Oh, you are all right now?" she murmured anxiously.

"Yes. I guess so." Dizzily he sat up.

"What happened?"

"We fell."

"You—it didn't hurt you?"

"No. I guess not much."

The action of the drug had worn off. As his head cleared he saw that the rocks were motionless; the ground on which he sat at last was steady. Around them now was a great void of luminous darkness with an undulating landscape of naked rocks dimly visible. In a moment it seemed to Carter that his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. He could see, far away in the distance where the ground rose up seemingly to meet the sky.

"Shall we take another pellet now, Lea?" he suggested at last.

"All right," she agreed.

Again they took the drug; and gazed appraisingly about them as the luminous, naked landscape crawled and shifted with its outward, upward motion. Tremendous journey downward into smallness! Carter had had no conception of the immense new distances which would open before them as they dwindled. For another hour, then two hours—three hours perhaps—they ran, and walked and climbed downward. Lea, with judgment, perception and memory far greater than any Earth-girl could have, had remarked well the main features of her upward climb, so that now she could recognize them. But more often than not, the way was obvious—by mathematical law, it was usually the first large aperture to open near them. Soon Carter was nimbly alert to get into it before it was too large, so that often a step or two downward, or a drop of six feet or so, would represent a long and dangerous descent if they had waited until they were smaller.

Again the drug wore off. "Shall we rest again?" he suggested.

She assented, and he made her lie with her head cushioned by his lap. Around them the phosphorescent darkness showed distant wilds of barren wastes. It was a ragged plateau here, with giant cliffs in the distance that rose thousands of feet against the blurred purple sky. He and Lea had jumped down from those cliffs only a little while ago—and it had been a drop of only waist high.

Poor little Lea. . . . No wonder she had

been terrified when she made this weird journey alone! Was she asleep now? He sat gazing drowsily down at her head on his lap; her delicate little profile, with eyes closed, her pale-gold hair framing her face, never had seemed so beautiful as now with the glowing phosphorescent of the rocks upon it. The luminous light made her delicate skin take on an added opalescent look. How beautiful she was! She would be radiant down there among her own people. They would be very glad to see her. That young fellow Artone—he no doubt would be especially glad to see her. She had said that Artone was handsome and courageous. She was very fond of him, no doubt. . . .

Perhaps Carter himself had dozed a little, here with his back against a rock. His fingers were entwined in a lock of Lea's pale-gold hair which he had been caressing. And suddenly it seemed that he heard something moving near them. It snapped him into startled alertness.

"Lea, wake up!" he whispered. He shook her a little. "Lea—"

"Oh—yes, George?"

"Quiet! Not so loud! I thought I heard something!"

He held her against him as she sat upright. Staring over her shoulder, he could see nothing but the tumbled spread of crags around them. Then the sound came again—a scratching, scuttling tread as though something gigantic were scampering on the rocks.

"George—" Lea faintly screamed. Her hand pressed her breast in terror as she slrank back against him. From around a nearby boulder a tremendous insect had come scuttling—a monstrous, reddish oblong thing, with a pinched body twenty feet in length and crooked jointed legs. With huge waving feelers, it stood for an instant motionless. Its great compound eyes, like clusters of tiny lanterns, glared balefully.

And then without warning it came lunging at them!

CARTER and the girl scrambled to their feet. The monstrous insect came with scuttling, scratching tread. Its antennæ, waving from the top of its ugly round head, furiously lashed. The mandibles of its great jaws worked as though

with anticipation of devouring these tiny victims.

"Lea—this way—jump—"

They scurried sidewise. It flashed to Carter that they must take the drug—the enlarging drug—grow large to fight this horrible adversary. But there was no time now to get out the vial. Frantically they darted behind a little group of rocks. The huge red insect, like a charging bull, went past them. Then, fifty feet away, it stopped; reared up on its two hind legs as though puzzled. The luminous radiation from the rocks showed it more plainly now—long bulging body with six crooked legs; body pinched in the middle grotesquely like a spindly waist so small that it seemed as though the twenty-foot body might break in half.

"It doesn't see us, George—"

"Quiet!"

They crouched among the rocks. There seemed no place else they could hide. Could they out-distance the horrible thing in a straightaway run? Carter did not think so; certainly he did not dare try it. He was fumbling with the drug-vial now. And then the monstrous insect saw them! It whirled; dropped to its six legs. The two great compound eyes again were glaring; and now on the top of its flattened, smooth-shelled head, near the sockets of the waving feelers, three other little eyes were visible—gleaming spots of light.

"Here, Lea—take these pellets—quickly—"

The giant insect was coming forward again, more slowly this time as though cautiously to stalk its tiny prey. Carter dropped two of the pellets into the trembling girl's extended palm; and took two himself. They were the violet ones—the diminishing drug. In the panic of the moment he could not select the others. His head reeled as he took the double dose, but he clung to Lea. In the swaying phantasmagoria of the luminous scene, he was aware that the monstrous scuttling thing again was charging head on. The rocks here were swaying, enlarging with a new acceleration, the spaces between them rapidly opening up.

In those horrible seconds, there was nothing Carter could think of to do but fling himself and the girl flat on the ground, squeezing into an opening which a moment

ago would have been too small for them. Vaguely he was aware of the sound of the monster's claws as they scratched on the rocks. It came with a rush. It was a monster thirty or forty feet long in a moment. Carter had a dim vision of the broad under surface of the tremendous body as it scrambled almost directly over him—scuttling headlong over the clump of rocks among which its dwindling prey were crouching.

"Now, Lea—up! Run!"

They staggered over the swaying, outward-crawling ground. In a moment Carter turned to look back. Far behind them in the glowing darkness, the insect again had reared up, vainly searching for them—a titan thing now, its reddish body looming a hundred feet or more above the ground. For a second or two it showed etched against the blur of sky, its eyes glaring like distant lighthouse lamps. Then an expanding cluster of nearby rocks intervened and they could no longer see it.

"We've got to be careful, Lea. Do things quickly or we'll get lost in size." With the attacking monster gone, Carter's wits came back to make him aware of a new danger. They had not intended to take this double dose of the diminishing drug. Gripping the girl, Carter stood unsteadily, peering around at the swaying scene. The apparent enlarging of the landscape was greatly accelerated, so swift that it was dizzying. But he could still recognize the main familiar features. Here was the rift into which they had determined they must go. . . .

THE doubled drug, though accelerated in action, seemed to last no longer than a smaller dose. But it was two hours or more of wild scrambling. Then at last Carter was aware by the visible slowing of the expanding scenes, that again it was wearing off.

"Well, thank God for that, Lea," he murmured. "Don't let's try anything like that again."

They were resting, preparing to take more of the drug, when on the bottom of Lea's ragged short shirt Carter saw a tiny ant crawling, evidently disturbed by the movement. He stared; then he reached, squashed it between thumb and forefinger.

"Just an ant," he said. "But those red

ones can bite. You must have gotten it on you in the garden when we left." A sudden thought made his jaw drop. A red ant—an eighth of an inch long maybe—six legs—a body pinched in the middle. . . .

"Why, good Lord, Lea," he gasped. "There could have been more red ants on us. One of them dropped off while we were getting small—then while we slept it found us and attacked us! That was the monster that nearly got us!"

Just an ant! What an amazing difference size could make!

Surely they still had much to learn about this weird traveling!

Carter could see that the cliffs here were honeycombed with tunnel-passages and cave-mouths. After resting a while they took more of the drug and went on.

They merely touched the pellet to the tongue. The dim landscape began slowly opening; and at intervals they repeated the tiny doses of the drug. They were walking forward, Lea eagerly leading now. To Carter it seemed that they had mounted a hill, topped a rise—emerged at last into the open. He stood amazed. The void of sky here suddenly showed infinite distance—a gigantic black firmament. In a great dome, myriads of stars were glittering—gems strewn upon the black velvet of the heavens, with faint effulgent patches of remote nebulae, star-dust strewn across the sky!

"There—the sky of my world," Lea murmured. "We need more of the drug now, George. Still, we are so very big—it would be dangerous to go forward in a size like this."

They tasted the drug several times. Lea would not let him move more than a few steps each time down the small declivity. Then they came to where the ground now seemed fairly level. It slowly shifted and crawled under their feet as they dwindled. And suddenly, as they walked slowly forward, Carter was aware that the ground wasn't rocky under them now. It was softer, with little scrunching ridges and lumps which he could feel through the battered soles of his shoes.

"There is the lake," Lea said presently. Her hand flung out with a gesture. He stared to one side with a new awe. Twenty or thirty feet away he had noticed a little patch of yellow sheen on the ground. But

it was hundreds of feet away now—a pool of shimmering water with a path of glowing starlight upon its rippled surface. Behind it there seemed to be wooded hills . . . tiny trees. . . .

QUITE suddenly—so suddenly indeed that the thing momentarily made Carter's head reel—his viewpoint changed. As though his eyes were thousands of feet in the air, he felt himself dizzily staring down at a little town of streets and buildings that clustered along the nearer lakeshore. He saw himself as he actually was, a monstrous Titan, standing here with his head reared thousands of feet into the sky and Lea's world shimmering peacefully in the starlight almost at his feet!

The ground under them was still expanding from the last small dose of the drug. The shining lake and the little city were growing larger, seeming to rise up; but they were also visually receding.

"We sure better start walking forward," Carter suggested. "It'll be an awfully long walk if we don't make speed before we get much smaller."

She agreed, and they hastened their pace. The ground crunched audibly now under their tread. Presently Carter could hear that it was a very queer crunch—a swishing, crackling of tiny sounds. Puzzled, he suddenly stopped and bent down. Under his feet a tiny forest was spread—strange-shaped, gray-blue trees, none of them more than an inch or two in height. Beneath his tread they were mangled—tiny furred twigs mashed and strewn, and some of them thrust by his weight into the soft ground.

Slowly the forest rose up, closed over their heads. Dark glades were here now. The soft air was perfumed by the flowers. The phosphorescence of the ground, more apparent in this arboreal dimness, streamed up to meet the effulgence of starlight which filtered down from overhead.

It was a peaceful, glowing forest of strange twilight. And suddenly Carter was aware of the stirring of bird-life in the trees; the sound of insect life under foot. New realms of infinitesimal smallness!

"Taroh evidently hasn't started anything while you were gone," he said. "Everything looks okay here. No need to worry over Taroh now, Lea. Not with us here,

with the drugs. Your world is in no danger now."

No danger? Within the city gates close ahead a sudden shrill cry rose up and floated out over the glowing forest. A cry of startled wonderment; of fear. Then others took it up—a chorus of terror within the little city. Along the top of the city wall the figures of the sentries, etched against the sky, were running.

"Why, what the devil—" Carter murmured.

Lea, in a panic, was gripping him. "Oh, George, look—off there by the lake!"

Far off beyond the crescent tip of the starlit lake a giant figure loomed! The starlight painted a huge man's head and shoulders—bullet head of close-clipped hair.

"Taroh!" Lea gasped.

Monstrous enlarging giant! He stood for a moment, head and shoulders above the forest trees, peering down at the lake and the little city. And then he came striding forward!

"LEA, dear—" Carter was clutching her by the shoulders. "Lea, you run on into the city. Find your father—you stay with him, Lea."

"Oh, George—what is it you do? The enlarging drug—"

Hastily he dumped the pellets into his palm. The white ones this time. How many should he take? He swallowed two; replaced the others.

"George—" He felt her gripping him as his senses reeled.

"George—" She gasped it in terror as she saw him towering beside her.

"It's all right—I'll take care of Taroh. Run, Lea! Run—"

Her little face was down at his waist. For a second she stared up; terrified—and wistful.

"You will—come back, George?"

"Yes. I'll come back—" He gave her a gentle shove; he stood staring as he saw her dwindling figure dart between the dwindling trees. Then he turned and ran back. Soon he was threading the narrowing spaces between the trees which were hardly as high as his head. . . .

Where was Taroh now? In the swooping, shrinking scene, for a minute or two Carter had wildly run away from the city.

He was stooping now, trying to keep below the dwindling tree-tops. Momentarily he did not see his adversary. But off in the distance there was the crackling of breaking twigs. It sounded like brush-fire. Abruptly it occurred to Carter that he did not dare delay any longer. Taroh, gigantic, in a moment might be demolishing the city. He stopped his advance; waited a moment and stood erect. The trees were well below his knees now. A hundred feet or so away was a patch of shimmering water like a great pool. He could see the spread of little city beside it, the tallest of its buildings not so high as his waist.

Off to the left was Taroh. Carter's heart leaped with triumph. Taroh seemed now not much more than a head taller than himself—massive chest and shoulders garbed in a leather garment, with knee breeches of leather beneath. A stalwart, heavy-set fellow. To Carter's viewpoint he was some seven feet tall. But he seemed shrinking a trifle. Carter was overtaking him in size!

Taroh saw him now! The starlight showed a look of amazement that for a second spread on his evil, heavy-featured face. Then he whirled from the edge of the pool; and as Carter darted backward to lure him away from the city, like a bull Taroh came charging, lunging, crashing through the tiny trees. He was far enough from the city now—Carter gauged it, and then suddenly turned, faced his adversary and then leaped for him.

The impact of their bodies knocked Carter backward. He fell, with his huge antagonist on top of him. It was the weight of a powerful, thick-set three-hundred-pound man nearly a foot taller than himself. He felt big arms around him; saw Taroh's face, contorted with rage. Locked together, they rolled, mangling the tiny forest. Then, despite Carter's agility, he felt himself pinned, with his adversary sprawled on top of him. A slowly shrinking adversary? To the panting, lunging, wildly twisting Carter it seemed so. But it was a negligible shrinkage now. He felt Taroh's powerful hands at his throat. Over him the bullet head was etched against the starlit sky. Then the evil face pressed down, leering, triumphant, with muttering gloating words, and hot panting breath.

Carter's senses were whirling. The strangling fingers at his throat had shut off his breathing. His head began to roar. Wildly he fought to get loose, but could not. . . . The end for George Carter . . . Lea—poor little Lea—this would be the end for her and her people also . . . all doomed. . . .

**I**N those terrifying, strangling seconds, dimly Carter was aware of the shrinking ground pulling in under his thrashing body. The crushed forest was like thick mangled fern-clumps. Was this water here? One of his flailing arms went down into a little puddle beside him. His hand struck a rock in the water. Instinctively, with fading senses, he gripped it; heaved it up, dripping; tried to crash it on Taroh's head, which was close above him. He heard his adversary grunt. It was a glancing blow; but Carter was aware of the strangling fingers momentarily loosening at his throat. He gulped in the blessed air; and with clearing head, despairingly he lunged, broke loose and heaved Taroh off.

Abruptly the crouching Taroh's hand went to his mouth. He was taking more of the enlarging drug! Carter tried to do the same. But he had no time; with a roar, again his adversary sprang at him. They clinched; staggered, but both kept on their feet. And within Carter's arms now he could feel the bulk of Taroh expanding! A rapid expansion. Soon he would be ten feet tall. . . . You couldn't win a rough and tumble like this against a giant ten feet tall. . . . Was this a rocky wall here beside them? . . . It seemed that Carter dimly could see looming rocks. Despairingly he was trying to break loose from Taroh, get away long enough to take more of the drug. But his triumphant antagonist was holding him as they staggered on their feet. Taroh was content to clinch. His massive body was horribly huge now—so huge that Carter's face was pressed against the chest of the leather jerkin.

It was now or never. Despairingly Carter knew it. In another minute he would be a puny child in the grip of this monstrous growing giant. He could see now that there was a towering rock wall here beside them. Carter's flailing hand struck it. Would some of the rocks be loose?

The dwindling wall pressed forward against him like a thing alive. His despairing fingers roved it. A loose chunk of rock—he found one. It was too large to grip. Then, in a moment, it had shrunk so that his fingers encircled one of its jagged ends. Desperately he tugged; tore it loose. It was a chunk of metallic rock as big as his head. With all the power he could muster, he crashed it sidewise against Taroh's huge temple. It was a direct blow, this time. Carter seemed to hear the gruesome cracking skull. He felt the huge arms around him loosen, drop away. For a second Taroh seemed to stand balanced, with buckling knees. A dead man on his feet. Then he fell, lay sprawled on his back with the inch-high forest trees crushed beneath him.

And one of his outstretched dead arms struck across a rill of shimmering water—a river that backed up against the Titan arm, then turned aside and went roaring off through the mangled forest! . . .

**A**T the city gates the running Lea had paused. She could hear that the city was in a wild turmoil of terror; shouting, running guards; people awakening in the middle of the time of sleep; appearing in windows or on rooftops; shouting at each other, or running out into the streets, gathering in milling, terrified groups. All staring at the monstrous fighting giants that loomed above the distant forest trees beyond the end of the lake.

And at the city gate, unnoticed by the gathering crowd, little Lea stood alone, gazing. Only she of everyone, knew the meaning of that weird combat. Which of the distant struggling giants was George? At first she could not tell. And then she saw him. . . .

Combat of Titans. Waist high above the forest trees and steadily looming higher, they stood swaying out there by the end of the lake. Then presently they fell, with a cataclysmic distant roar as they crashed down. She saw a huge arm go down into the lake. George's arm! Her heart seemed stuck in her throat as breathlessly she stared. Was George winning? His hand, with a dripping boulder as big as her father's castle perhaps, came heaving from the lake. The distant dripping water was a monstrous opalescent cascade in the

starlight. Then a great wave from it came surging down the lake. It beat with a roar against the city embankment; some of it rolled up into the streets, so that the terrified people there rushed screamingly back.

The giant figures were on their feet again. She could not see them clearly. They were so far away now—just blurred monstrous shapes looming into the sky. Fighting men, each of them bigger than all the city of Helos. Then presently they were fading shadows, big as all the sky, blurring with it. The roaring sound of them was only a monstrous fading whisper. And then they were gone.

Was the battle over? Who had won? . . . To each of us, himself is the center of the Universe. . . . The white-faced, trembling little Lea stood at the city gate staring at the empty luminous distance. And because she was a woman, she wanted George to have won—for herself, as well as for the fate of her people. . . .

**I**N the lamplit Carter living room, George sat with his father and Alice. He was in his bathing suit; ragged, dirty and bloodstained. He had told them now of his weird experience; how he had killed Taroh; and then, still getting large, had come on and emerged again into his normal Earth-world. . . .

"You've still got some of the drugs?" Professor Carter said finally. "Good Lord, George—a trip like that, you could have been killed a hundred times. You accomplished your purpose—I'm glad of that. Taroh is dead. No use trying to connect that world with this one any further. It's against nature. And those drugs—the most diabolic things that exist in the world today. I'll demonstrate them to our scientists—then we'll have them destroyed."

Did the blind little Alice perhaps feel differently? Her sensitive fingers caressed the stubble of beard on George's bloodstained face. "In the morning you'll tell me all about Lea?" she murmured. "I—I really loved her, George."

"Yes—yes, of course I will," he agreed. He avoided his father's demand for the drugs. "In the morning, Dad," he said. "Don't worry—I'll be careful of them. You and Alice better get to bed now. For

me, I want a bath and shave. And a lot of sleep. I'm about all in."

He kissed his father affectionately. His caress as he embraced his blind little sister lingered for just a moment.

"Good night, Alice dear."

"Good night, George."

There was no one to see young George Carter as, later that night, he furtively tiptoed downstairs. Quietly he left the house, went down to the little rock garden where the moonlight gleamed on the old sundial and its metal pointer. And he did not come back. . . .

That was more than a year ago. They found his scrawled little note: "Don't worry over me—I'll return shortly."

But so far, he has not. The sundial is in the Carter living room now; the room is closed off and never used. If you go to the small New England village, perhaps Professor Carter would let you see the sundial. A microscope has been erected over it. A light always shines on the old metal pointer.

Professor Carter is somewhat a grouchy, dogmatic old fellow. You might not like him. But despite that, there is never a day passes that for hours he does not sit at the microscope, peering downward so futilely little of the way, straining his eyes, hoping and praying that his son will return.

And often, too, the blind little Alice sits there, listening, waiting for the tiny voice which will tell her that her brother has emerged. She is sure he will come; it would not be like him to go and never return at all. She wishes, too, that he would bring Lea back with him. . . .

If you should go to see the Carters, go at night. Gaze up at the immensity of the distant stars, the faintest nebulae over the house. They are thousands, millions, trillions of light-years away—distances beyond conception of the human mind. Then go in and stand by the sundial in the Carters' little living room. You'll see, quite plainly, the tiny abrasion on the narrow top edge of the triangular sundial pointer. Lea's world, infinitely distant, beyond the reach of any microscope, is there—her world with its own remote heavens, and its own myriad tiny atoms—and each of them holding still other infinitudes of smallness.

# MARTIAN TERROR

*A Novelet of Revolution Among the Venusians*

By ED EARL REPP



**L**OLAN'S pen made the only sound in the stuffy barracks room. The words took shape reluctantly beneath the official army letterhead, even as his mind had fought against framing them. He sat alone at his desk, the open window behind him crowding in the dank heat of a Venusian summer night. The collar of his ornate, iridite-crusted uniform was open, but a dark ring of perspiration stained its top.

Lolan laid the pen down and looked at what he had written. His violet-gray eyes became stony. This letter might mean demotion to the ranks, or even court-martial, but the things in him had festered there too long.

"Herewith I tender my resignation as Sub-Commander of the Martian Army of Occupation on the planet Venus," he read. "If it is the wish of the Council-Royal, I desire immediate transfer to some post on Mars. I can no longer blind my conscience to the brutal treatment Venusians are receiving at the hands of us, their conquerors.

"When I accepted this post two years ago, I understood that, under Commander Arzt, I would be endeavoring to control a savage, half-wild people scarcely more intelligent than beasts. I found them gentle, intelligent, cheerful, demanding only the treatment we accord our slaves at home. But do they receive it? No! We dole them food not fit for swine. We work





**Lolan, the Martian Sub-Commander, had no choice. He sorrowed for Princess Mora's beaten, X-ray starved subjects. But when the desperate Venusians raised their empty fists, duty commanded him to cut loose his force-bolts.**

them fifteen hours a day in their own iridite mines, in the sulphur holes, at whatever other work is beneath a Martian soldier. Their population has been reduced twenty percent during the twenty years since Mars conquered them. Disease is prevalent in their poorer quarters—little better than the 'improved' sections—to such an extent that few officers ever venture into these pestilential streets except to put down an occasional uprising.

"Because I feel that to continue in this post would demean—"

Lolan scowled at the unfinished sentence. He went to the window and stood staring out, his eyes not seeing the low clouds brushing the barracks roofs, nor the jagged tracery of lights a half-mile below, where Areeba sprawled in miserable squalor over the foothills. Before him was the vision of a girl's sober face—the face of a Venusian, high-caste woman. Princess

Mora . . . princess only in name, but beloved of her people—and of Lolan.

But for her, that letter would have been written and handed in a year ago. But somehow the young Martian could not leave Venus while she and her father, old ex-Emperor Atarkus, were still here and under continual threat of death. There could never be any more intimate relation between them than that of master and slave—yet Lolan kept a forlorn flame of hope guttering in his heart.

There were two good reasons why he was a fool to let Mora be a factor in his staying on Venus. In the first place, intermarriage was strictly forbidden by Arzt, high commander of the army. Second—and more important to Lolan—biology entered in. Years ago, a few Martian soldiers had taken native wives, with tragic results. Although the two races were almost alike in appearance, except for the deeper coloring of the invaders, the children resulting from such unions were ugly, half-witted little monsters. Fortunately, none of them lived for more than a few years.

Lolan's lean young features hardened. Why fight it any longer? He couldn't have Mora, couldn't help her people without being a traitor to his own race. With an oath he pivoted from the window.

It was then that he saw the indicator on his tele-screen flashing angrily. Quick strides carried him there, a flip of the thumb made the silver screen a window to the outside world. The brutal face of Irak, Captain of the Secret Service, took shape.

"—repeating:" came the tail end of his announcement. "Two minutes ago the house in which Ars Lugo is hiding was entered by two persons. I am in an upstairs room across the street. I could not be sure of their identity, but I believe we are on the verge of breaking the secret of the recent revolution rumors. Haste is imperative if we are to trap them together. . . ."

Excitement tingled through Lolan. Ars Lugo, a condemned revolutionary lately escaped from the Sulphur Holes, had contacted friends. Arzt had been right in deliberately letting him escape and tracking him to a hideout. "Rotten meat draws flies quickly," was his way of putting it. Now

the flies had been drawn. But an unknown terror kept Lolan from even guessing at their identities— Swiftly he hurried from the room as somewhere the officers' alarm began chiming.

A small, silent gravity-repulsion ship set eight men in the uniform of high Martian officers down a few blocks from the slum in which Captain Irak was tensely waiting for them. Lolan emerged with set face. Around him on the flat roof of the building where they had landed were grouped the others.

The voice of Arzt came harshly through the quiet. He was a short, immensely powerful man, with reddish features stamped with the cast of brutality. There was a slovenliness to him, a brutal arrogance that was betrayed by every ugly twist of his mouth as he spoke.

"Lolan, you'll give the order," he snapped. "These filthy revolutionists won't be looking for trouble if you handle it right. We'll have them before they know what's happened. I told you Ars Lugo would get in touch with his cronies as soon as he thought he wasn't being watched. Come on!"

They left the ship on the roof and groped down an outside stairway to the narrow street. A light fog hung yellowish in the streets. For a moment after their feet touched the slimy cobblestones, the eight Martians huddled together by a single impulse—revulsion at the sordidness of the lower-class quarter.

Sickly gleams kindled on their uniforms where stray beams from dingy windows found them. The stench of rotting offal insulted their nostrils, mingled with the musty, revolting odors peculiar to the south side of Areeba, principal city of Venus. A place of drunken, tottering buildings and vice and sickness that festered like a raw sore, the south side was the abode of the diseased, the degenerate, the lawless.

With a muttered curse, Lolan swung down the street. It didn't have to be like this. It was commanders like Arzt who let the Venusians suffer for their own enrichment. Inwardly, a resolution was taking possession of the young officer that this was his last duty on Venus. Tomorrow . . . his letter of resignation would be handed in.

IN a dark alley across the street from a crumbling, one-story hovel, he slipped into the shadows. His eyes were riveted to the yellow cracks of light opposite him, where bolted shutters guarded some furtive scene within that house. Then he was moving swiftly backwards as two forms reeled from the fog. His eyes narrowed to careful slits that raked the pair.

They had not seen him, nor, apparently, the other hidden Martians they had just passed. Their bellies were so full of cheap Martian *gyla* that all they could see was the heaving stones under their feet. Lolan's slim, dark fingers fell from the *sadon* pistol at his side. The fog swallowed the derelicts.

Ragged nerves leaping, Lolan strode across the street, knocked softly at the door. Frightened gasps found their way through the portal. Someone gruffed:

"Who is it? What do you want?"

Lolan pressed his lips against a crack in the door. "Lugo—you've got to get out! They know you're here! I heard two of them talking. Let me in, will you! I can't stand here shouting."

A bolt scraped in its bed and the door inched back the width of a man's black eye. From both sides of Lolan, burly, powerful shapes lunged at the door. The man behind it cried out a single shrill warning as he was hurled to the floor.

Six Martian officers clanked inside. Arzt loomed up with Captain Irak, gripped Lolan's arm. "Good work!" he grunted. "Now we'll have these dirty Venusian rebels where we want them, eh?"

Hard-jawed, Lolan made no answer but strode in. One glimpse of the room's interior sent shock through his vitals like a sword. A single, whispered word parted his bloodless lips: "Mora!"

The girl across the room glanced at him in hurt surprise. Quickly she looked away. She stood erect and pale under the soldiers' eager glances. She was tall, for a Venusian, with slim, strong limbs and golden hair lying soft about her shoulders. Her garments were of the roughest cloth, but dignity and courage were in the flash of her eyes and the spots of color in her cheeks.

During those first moments Lolan was conscious only of a growing ache in his throat. He wanted to ask Mora and her

father, standing there beside her, why they had come here, since they knew it meant death to consort with revolutionists. But he sensed that their kind of courage would laugh at the question. In Lolan's breast, a cold, dead thing had taken the place of his heart.

The ex-emperor stood fierce and tall, a shaggy-headed man of sixty-five. He was a living skeleton dressed in hanging garments. Most of the life in him seemed to be concentrated in his blazing eyes. There was force in his countenance, but his voice came in the cracked accents of an old man.

"What's the meaning of this? Can't a man and his daughter call on their friends without being watched like criminals?"

Arzt swaggered close, his stubby legs moving stiffly. "Not when they'd like to see a revolution as much as you two!" he taunted. "You admit conspiracy with this rebel?"

Ars Lugo stood between two hulking officers, scowling at the Commander. "Conspiracy!" he spat. "Don't hang that crime on them. I was out of food and money and knew they could help me a little. I sent for them."

Arzt smashed a thick palm across the man's face. Contempt twisted his ill-formed features. He jerked a thumb at the well-like hole, guarded by a low rim, in a far corner, where refuse was thrown in such cheap hovels as this. "Another of your filthy lies and you'll go down the sewer. In the underground rivers you'll have plenty of time to think up better ones. Now, you two—" He grinned wickedly at Mora and Atarkus. "There's a little matter of a map I've heard rumors of. Who's got it—one of you, or Lugo?"

"You talk like a fool!" raged Atarkus. "We've got no map, you vile butcher."

Arzt's struggle for self-control was evident in the working of his jaw muscles. Presently he relaxed. He drew on his feeble powers of sarcasm. "The matter has been brought to my attention," he purred gutturally, "that one of your esteemed countrymen, a garbage-boy in the barracks, has been making a map of the buildings. I had the extremely painful duty—painful to him—of cutting his body here and there and pouring in burning sulphur; but the lad would not talk. But since he carried no papers, I judge he

passed them on earlier. Now, you bag of bones—" he roared suddenly, "where is that map?"

"You are screaming into the wrong hole to get an echo," Mora replied coldly. "We know nothing."

"Nothing, eh?" A small knife flashed into Arzt's fingers. He caught Atarkus in a vicious hug and placed the blade just under his ear. "Then remember it, before your father strangles on his own blood!"

Lolan stiffened, his hand dropping to the *sadon* pistol. The weapon was halfway out of its holster when a new voice intruded obsequiously. "Commander—I wouldn't do that!"

## II

IT was scrawny little Captain Irak who had spoken. An apologetic smile bracketed his lips and he was shaking his head slowly. Lolan knew a warm rush of gratitude toward him. Ugly as he was, he was intelligent and less sadistic than many of the officers. He said little—which made the Sub-Commander suspect he knew much.

Arzt grunted, puzzled, "You wouldn't—? Why not, you grinning, ugly little ape?"

Irak kept on smiling blandly. "Look outside," he advised.

Arzt did, but still kept his hold on the old man. There were a score of shabby Venusians peering in from the dark street like wolves around a fire on the high Martian steppes. They fell back under the impact of so many eyes.

Irak closed the door. "Kill Atarkus tonight and by morning we'll have a first-class revolution on our hands," he said. "These people worship Atarkus and his daughter. If he is to die, it must be otherwise . . . secretly, perhaps, in the dungeons where no one will ever learn."

Arzt's hands fell to his side. "There's wisdom in what you say," he begrudged. "Especially . . . the last part. But if I find the proof I need of their guilt tonight, there'll be no waiting. We can try, and execute them, publicly. Search the woman, Lolan. I'll search this ancient blasphemer myself."

Lolan hesitantly fell to the task. "I'm sorry!" he whispered. She gave no sign that she had heard, no indication that it

meant any more or less to her that he must perform the job than anyone else; nor had Lolan ever known if she returned his feelings. Their meetings had been few, when they had come to Arzt's court-martial occasionally to plead for their countrymen on some matter. With his pulses racing, he searched her gown thoroughly and found no suspicious articles. He was red-faced and perspiring when Arzt barked:

"Then that devil's got it! Search Lugo, men!"

That order was the cue for the lanky Venusian to hurl himself from the arms of his captors. "The sewer!" Lolan gasped. Lugo was heading for the black-mouthed hole to hurl himself into the underground river two hundred feet below . . . himself and anything he carried!

The young Martian did not stop to reason that Ars Lugo might be carrying the evidence that would send Mora and her father to their deaths. He acted purely by instinct, flinging himself upon the revolutionary and dragging him to the floor. But Lugo was up again, like a released spring. Lolan crawled frantically after him. He grabbed a heel, brought the Venusian spinning about while he lurched to his feet. A jabbing fist sent him reeling back. In the next moment Ars Lugo was diving feet first down the hole!

Lolan's muscles had been leaned to spring-steel tautness in rigorous Martian military exercises. It was only that whip-lash power of them that enabled him to grasp one of Ars Lugo's hands as he vaulted the low rim. In a flash he knew his error. The Venusian's weight was hauling him across the smooth floor and into the pit of death!

THERE was a moment of un-thinking panic, of hearing the distant roar of tumbling black water and the savage grunts of the man dangling below him. Someone grabbed his feet and his headlong plunge was arrested. Arzt was shouting: "Hold him! Don't let him get away with that paper!"

Lolan fought the burning numbness of his forearm. Ars Lugo had ripped off a belt-buckle and was slashing at his knuckles with it. The men above kept shouting encouragement while they fought for leverage. Every sinew in the Martian's body

stood out in ridges and knots. Sweat bathed his flesh, and he knew that moisture was causing Lugo to slip still further. "Hurry!" he groaned. "I can't—"

With startling abruptness he was flying out of the hole, while Ars Lugo, with strips of skin under his fingernails that he had ripped from Lolan's hand, went spinning down into black nothingness. Pain had beaten determination. Ars Lugo had won—death!

Horror held the officers around the hole like statues, staring down. It was during that interval that Lolan felt a hard, slippery object in his hand. He opened it to see the bracelet Ars Lugo had worn, which he had somehow torn loose. A curious, heavy ornament of iridite crystals and onyx, and on the inside of it strange scratchings, like—

Like a map! Some impulse caused Lolan's fingers to clamp on the bracelet. Arzt was staring.

"And there goes our chance for a quick disposal of these other two," he grunted sourly. "If you could have . . . well, it's done now." Briskly he gave an order. "Take them home. But remember this, Venusians—your consorting with revolutionaries has marked you for death! At any day, any hour, I may have you seized and brought back."

Atarkus paused scornfully on the threshold. Mora had already gone, her head high and eyes straight ahead. "We don't frighten easily," the old ruler flung back. "When you live in hell as we do, one more pit of damnation merely serves to bore us. May you boil in your own lard, Martian pig!"

Arzt swore at him and half-drew his pistol. Sneering, then, he relaxed and turned to fix Lolan with a burning glance. "Your failure tonight intrigues me," he offered suggestively. "You never seemed to be hindered by pain to that extent before."

Lolan showed him his bleeding fingers, from which great drops of blood were falling. "It was the shock," he murmured. "You don't think I let him escape on purpose—!"

"I hardly imagine you could be so foolish. At any rate, you'll be given a chance to redeem yourself. Sometime in the next three or four days I want those two killed,

very quietly and—very thoroughly. The honor is to be yours."

Lolan's shocked eyes flashed to a pair of burning, amused ones. Arzt's broad lips were smiling fixedly. The young officer tried to mask his horror. "Let someone else do it," he countered. "Killing women is out of my line."

"Killing *that* woman, you mean!" the Commander pounced on him. "I've known what was in your mind all these months. I hoped you'd see the foolishness of it. You're too good a man to lose inside the execution chamber. What's the matter with you, Lolan? Are you deceiving yourself that these damned Venusian dogs are good enough for a Martian officer?"

Hatred swept Lolan suddenly like a flame. With difficulty he held his voice to a flat, deadly hiss. "Good enough! Too good, if you ask me! I'm sick of driving sick men into mines reeking of sulphur fumes, to dig iridite for us to decorate our uniforms with. Tired of seeing them live like animals, in filthy shacks ready to fall in on them or in tenements crawling with vermin. If cracking a bloody whip is what being a Martian officer means, I'm ashamed of being one. I'd change my Sub-Commander's rank here for that of a private back on Mars!"

Arzt's face grew hot and red with a dark suffusion of blood. "The only transfer I'll give you is to Rock Island, on the Fluorine Sea," he grated. "Would that suit you better?"

Lolan's spine crawled. Rock Island was a tiny hump of land in the middle of a sea perpetually blanketed in fogs—fogs laden with deadly fluorine. But someone had to keep the light on that island to guide incoming space-ships. The keepers usually lasted about six weeks. "In other words, I stay here or I die!" he stated flatly.

"Exactly. So let's hear the last of this. If you complain again I'll take it as treason. Remember my orders: In four days I want to see their bodies in the dead-house. If I don't—it will be yours I'll see there!"

**L**OLAN'S first chance to examine the bracelet was in the solitude of his room an hour later. He drew all the shades, while a feeling of tension built stiflingly within him. Under the soft glow of a lamp he studied it.

Plainly he traced the outlines of all the buildings in the rambling system of barracks that sprawled over the hill. Rooms had been marked in by someone who knew the set-up. The Martian received a stiff jolt at seeing his room, and Arzt's, marked with X's. Marked for death, he knew!

Lolan's fist closed on the bauble. He let his glance go to the curtained window, seeming to see through and beyond it. A tumult of jarring thoughts rang harsh discordance in his mind. But clear and sharp sounded one note, that his hands must slay Mora and her father or he himself would die. No night-long brain-wracking was needed for him to know that he preferred death to carrying out Arzt's orders. But perhaps . . . there was another way!

Lolan stood rigid, letting the idea revolve in his mind. Abruptly, he swung from the window, jamming the bracelet onto his own wrist. He left his room silently, and through the dim corridors he found his way to the commissionary. His private keys unlocked the dark vaults. Carefully shutting the door, he switched on the lights.

Piles of goods were everywhere, looming in long rows before him and filling great bins. The Martian's nerves set up a raw tingling as he found a box and hurried to a bin. Five nervous minutes passed, with Lolana piling preserved foods of all kinds into the box. As a last item, he buried a pair of *sadon* pistols in the mass of foodstuffs.

Grim resolution was in the hard set of his jaw when he switched off the lights, relocked the place, and left by a back entrance. He was able to reach a pursuit ship in the hangar and load his stuff in without being observed. Panic struck at him, then . . . a sentry's running feet sounded outside!

Lolan sprang to the door. He eased through it, to be speared by the man's torch. Casually, he nodded to him.

"Oh! Sorry, sir, I didn't realize it was an officer," the sentry apologized. "Taking your ship out this late?"

Lolan said crisply, "Official business down below. Go back to your post. I can manage it alone."

The sentry clicked his heels, saluted, and departed. Lolana's knees shook a little. He rolled the battered pursuit ship out and hurriedly entered it. Hope that the guard

didn't realize he wasn't taking his private ship tonight kept him glancing around at the dim form of the sentry. On that fact hinged his life.

Then he was slamming the accelerator on full. The ship screamed upward, borne aloft on the green mushroom of flame. Almost immediately he had crossed the city and gained the plains beyond. In a broken expanse of rock and sand just outside the lower quarter, he set the craft down gently.

No one saw him enter the city. He threaded the tortuous alleys of the squalid section with his heart hammering in his ears. At last he was stopping across from a large, five-story building. It was a ponderous, gabled affair full of reminiscences of former glory—elaborate cornices crumbling away, great, metal doors green with age, once white walls now streaked with black and gray. In carved Venusian characters, a plaque over the door lamented: "Hall of Justice."

Lolan was thinking of that sad commentary as he ascended to the top floor. Justice—when the man who once ruled this entire planet now lived on crusts in a tiny room in the tower!

It was Princess Mora whose hand opened the door at his knock. In the dim light of the room, her face showed sad and accusing. "What?" she asked bitterly. "Haven't you done with persecuting us for one night?"

Atarkus looked up from a table where he had been poring over old Venusian books, a pair of spectacles perched on his beak-nose. "Well, speak!" he shrilled finally. "What miserable errand brings you here?"

Lolan's face was hard. He kept his glance on Mora's widening eyes as he took off Ars Lugo's bracelet and extended it to her. "Ars Lugo died trying to hide this," he growled. "I thought you might like to save it. But as a favor—would you mind taking the black cross off my quarters?"

### III

**A**TARKUS was on his feet, shaking. Mora let the Martian place the bracelet in her hand before she gasped: "You—you knew! And didn't tell! Why?"

Lolan lowered himself into a chair. He sighed despondently: "I don't know. Ii

I'd valued my own life I'd have turned it over to Arzt. But I've had my fill of watching you Venusians tortured."

The girl's eyes glowed. She said softly: "That was your only reason?"

Lolan's heart thumped. His face flamed, and he tried to hide his embarrassment by springing to his feet and pacing to a window. "It's reason enough," he muttered. He swung suddenly to face them across the room. "But that isn't why I came here tonight. It's something more important than that. You've got to leave Areeba immediately!"

Atarkus' face folded into grim lines. "You mean Arzt has decreed our death?"

"That's it. You might have expected something like this for being seen with men like Ars Lugo."

Mora looked up into the officer's face. "I can't understand you, Lolan. You're supposed to be second in command of the race that oppresses us. Yet you risked death to hide that bracelet, and undoubtedly you've taken the same risk to come here."

"Don't try to understand me. Simply do as I say. Arzt has appointed me to execute you within four days. I—I can't do it, that's all. So I'm going to try to dodge the issue by letting you escape. Beyond the city there's a pursuit ship loaded with food and a pair of pistols. With that outfit you can make it to Lyna or some other settlement where you won't be known. But you've got to do it tonight!"

Atarkus snorted. "Leave our people when they need us most? Never!"

Lolan's eyes narrowed. "When they need us most," the ex-emperor had said. Why were they needed especially now—because of a coming revolution? He drove the question from his mind. "Don't quibble!" he snapped. "I can't promise you more than a few hours' leeway. You've got to leave within the hour."

"It's no use," Mora smiled wearily. "Our people look up to us for the answer to every problem that arises. What would they think of us if we ran out now?"

"What good will you be to them dead?" Lolan argued desperately. "Arzt means to have you out of the way once and for all. You're dangerous and he knows it. Get your things together and let's go!" The flush of repressed fear colored the flat angles of his jaws. His mind was a whirl-

pool of hope and regret—regret at losing Mora forever, though he could never own her; a deep soul-sickness at the idea of sending a force-charge into her lovely body. . . .

But Mora was shaking her head and Atarkus had smashed his fist on the table. "Arzt can't scare us!" the aged monarch scorned. "They say we Venusians are weak, that we don't know how to fight. Some day soon the butcher will learn differently." His eyes grew softer. He laid his bony hand on Lolan's hard forearm. "I know your position, young man. You have taken a liking to us for some reason—I think I know what it is—and the thought of killing us disturbs you. Perhaps you won't have to perform that duty—"

Suspicion and wonder blended into the creases of Lolan's forehead. "Then you won't go?" he breathed.

"We can't," Mora told him. "But you have our gratitude for all you've done."

Lolan straightened. He tried to keep his voice clipped and emotionless. "You are foolish—and brave. Good night!"

When he reached the boulder-hidden rocket ship it was still safely masked in its hiding place. The fog had torn apart for a few hours, and through the ragged holes in it he could see stars blinking solemnly down at him. The young Martian's heart leaped at the thought of leaving for one of those far-off worlds; no one would miss him before morning and he could stock up on supplies and leave right away. But a leaden despondency kept that idea from gaining much headway. Gloomily he climbed into the ship.

It was when his fingers had sent the rocket car tearing up into the low clouds that Arzt's voice, just behind him, made his blood turn to water and his lips go dry.

"You're heading the right way, Sub-Commander. Over the hill to the Sulphur Holes. Tonight's warning was my last."

**I**N the gleaming black disk of one of the space-ports Lolan could see Arzt's reflection, then, looming squat and dangerous three feet in back of him. He had quietly removed Lolan's pistol and held it on the back of his head.

"Planning a trip, were you?" the taunting voice went on. "I found quite a store of food here. The only trip you'll be mak-

ing now is into the bottom dungeon of the Holes. By the gods, Lolan, you're a fool!"

"Am I? It might as well be now as four days from now. You know I couldn't kill them."

"I knew this: That if you couldn't, you weren't fit to be a Martian officer. Now I'll have to do the job myself. Because you're going to die tomorrow!"

Silence piled up between them. Too soon the gaping slash on the planet's surface known as the Sulphur Holes was pivoting beneath them as they circled to a landing. Here, where subterranean forces had carved a series of natural dungeons and rock-bound gases still seeped through the holes in a stifling mist, the least fortunate of Arzt's prisoners were imprisoned.

Burly guards came running up to take charge of Lolan. Arzt stood back with fists on hips. "Take him to the bottom level," his guttural command came. "Watch him closely. The devil's been conspiring with Venusians for a revolution!"

He watched coldly while they jostled his former chief officer into the little rock house that housed the elevator. He stood there stolidly until a deep-pitched sigh emanated from the structure, denoting that one more soul had been carried down . . . to hell. A fierce grin twisted his lax features. He was so engrossed in his own thoughts that he did not hear the closing of the storage-hatch on the pursuit ship they had come in, nor did he see the spidery form that slid from it to the shelter of some rocks. Deeply and sadistically satisfied, Commander Arzt turned and departed.

For the first ten minutes after his captors had left him, Lolan sat on the edge of a hard, filthy cot with his head buried in his hands. The cell was low-ceilinged, with eroded sandstone walls studded with sharp metal crystals. Through the barred door drifted stringy tendrils of gas—sulphur smoke, belching up from the planet's bowels. From nearby cells came horrible moans, a ragged scream, the rattling of a door as some hapless prisoner shook it and shouted for food. The soft plod-plod of of someone pacing the floor like a caged beast reached the Martian's ears.

Lolan's lungs seemed filled with acid. He coughed until tears streamed from his eyes. Finally he fell back in despair on

the cot. But even in his desperate physical pain he was far more conscious of acute despair over the failure of his plans to save Mora and Atarkus. He felt that no torture could be worse than imagining what devilish end Arzt would find for them.

The grating of a key in the lock brought Lolan to a sitting posture. Then he had sprung to the door as Captain Irak, spindly, grinning little imp that he was, flung the door open and dodged in.

"Irak—what the devil are you doing here?" Lolan coughed.

The other pressed something hard and cold into his hand—a gun. "No questions now!" he rapped. "Follow me and use this if you need it—which you will!"

"But the keys—how did you get them?"

Irak closed one shoe-button eye in a sly wink, and gestured with his gun. "Come on!" he jerked his head. Roughly he shoved the younger man into the tunnel.

Not understanding what it all meant, Lolan fled through the corridors beside him. Hope was kindling like a fire in his breast. Once the captain paused before a cell and through the bars tossed the bunch of keys. "Use them yourself and pass them on!" he laughed at the astonished prisoner.

Up ahead the elevator loomed out of the wisps of gas. Irak plunged into it and Lolan followed. There was silence until they had almost reached the top.

"Be on your guard," Irak snapped. "I killed the turnkey to get the keys. If they've found his body—" The automatic door flew open, light from the guard-house flooded their figures and they stiffened. The shouting of angry men reached their ears from outside.

Irak looked at him in somber decision. "We'll try a run for it out the back. There's a rocket car in the field. It's our one chance."

Lolan grinned boyishly, ready for anything. "Lead the way!" he offered. "I'm with you!"

**B**UT they had not gone forty feet when a harsh shout arrested them. "There they go—*get them!*" Five men sprang up from where they had knelt about the body of a dead Martian.

Captain Irak stuck a skinny leg between Lolan's running feet and send him sprawl-



ing in the dirt. Lolan was puzzled, until he felt the searing impact of force bolts inches over his head. The movement had saved his life. Instantly he had twisted about to sight down the chrome-steel shaft of his pistol. It roared, jarred heavily against his hand. And one of the men staggered back with his head and shoulders half torn off.

Irak chuckled fiendishly. His own gun blasted twice, destroying a man at each shot. The remaining pair spread out and came at a low run for them, with guns crackling blue lightning over the terrain. Lolan's eyes were hard and narrow, his jaw was firm. The impact of deadly charges exploded all around him, making his ears ring with the terrific concussion. He cuffed at his coat-sleeve as blobs of molten earth splattered on it. Some of the fiery stuff bit through to his skin.

The Martian's hate-twisted countenances were plain now, thirty feet away. With a simultaneous impulse they flung themselves prone and leveled their guns. Lolan squeezed the trigger of his weapon. He kept it pulled back until the gun grew hot and smoking and the last bolt had been launched. Irak had done the same.

A grisly silence came down over the field. Horror gripped Lolan as the smoke drifted away and showed two shapeless masses of burning flesh on the ground before them. Doggedly he turned away, getting to his feet.

From nearby came the clamor of hurrying guards. "Quick!" Irak's voice crackled. "Into the ship."

They made it none too soon. Force charges were exploding under their soaring ship like blue balloons that swelled to magnificent proportions and then exploded. Not until they had gained thirty thousand feet altitude did Lolan relax from the controls.

His face was sweaty and grinning. "Am I crazy or are you, Irak? I thought you were Captain of the Secret Service, sworn to track down rebels like me—not help them escape!"

Irak was lighting a Martian cigarette. He paused with lighter held to the cylinder's tip. "Quite true," he smiled. "That is my job. But when the rebel is a fellow-Venusian, I am tempted to reverse the usual order of things!"

## IV

Lolan's mouth hung open. Had he heard aright? "You said—a fellow Venusian? Didn't you mean . . ."

"I mean Venusian. And by the way—congratulations on your escape, *Prince Lolan!*"

Somewhere in him a pulse began throbbing, as Lolan fumbled to put the controls on automatic. Then he twisted about on the seat and gripped his knees with his hands. "Let's get this straight," he suggested impatiently. "I'm Sub-Commander Lolan—ex-Sub-Commander, I should say. You're Captain Irak—also 'ex', I'm afraid. We're both Martians and neither of us has so much as a drop of royal blood of any race coloring his veins. Starting from that basis, would you mind explaining your remarks?"

Irak leaned back in his chair. "Not at all. You are Prince Lolan, of the House of Sarn. Twenty years ago, when you were two years old, all of your people were killed in the Martian invasion. Among fifty other Venusian children, you were taken back to Mars. The war chiefs wanted to experiment, to find out what difference the Martian atmosphere had on the development of a child of Venus. All of those other children were killed due to lack of care on the return voyage. You alone lived . . . to become a high-ranking Martian officer!"

The blood had drained from Lolan's face, leaving it a sickly color. His hands shook a little. It was too much to grasp at once. "Irak, you're telling the truth?" he gasped. "But you can't be. Look at me: I'm dark, like a Martian . . . so are you, as far as that goes. And why would they let me hold such a responsible position?"

"Of course you're dark!" Irak laughed. "Who wouldn't be, after eighteen years of blistering Martian suns? As far as their letting you gain position is concerned, they had two reasons for doing it. In the first place, they found that you were developing into a brilliant, scholarly youth who could go far if allowed to. You had something no other Venusian before you had: initiative and the ability to fight like a bulldog on any problem you attempted. Perhaps the ultraviolet rays so strong on Mars and

so feeble here have something to do with that. At any rate, you are strong and determined where the rest of our race is vacillating, good-natured, and pliable. Their other reason for letting you fight your way to the top in their own army was that, to their cruel minds, it seemed a good joke to let a Venusian have partial charge of his own down-trodden people. But the joke may backlash. . . ."

"And you?" Lolan murmured. "Where do you come in?"

"I went back on the same ship that took you, but as a stowaway. I hid in the upper part of the ship where the constant, harsh light of the sun soon blackened my fair skin as dark as theirs. I killed a soldier one night and took his uniform. It wasn't hard to take his place. They were a motley crew from all over Mars, a sort of foreign legion, and few knew each other. By the time we reached Mars I was able to mingle safely with the men. And as years went on I completed my Martian education, vied with others for honors. I gained those honors for one purpose—to fight again in a Venusian army, to wipe the scourge from the face of our planet. Now we are ready!"

Lolan sank back. He felt like a man who has had too strong a dose of some powerful drug. "Now I can explain a lot of things," he murmured. "I've had the feeling so many times that I've been a certain place before, yet I never understood why." He got up, began pacing the tiny cabin with restless tread. When he spoke again, at last, he seemed to be talking to himself. "Then it must be true. I'm not one of Arzt's bloodthirsty race, I'm a Venusian—one of Mora's race!" Abruptly, he whirled on the little intelligence officer. "Well, what now? Where are we going?"

Irak let a thin smile curve his lips. "To the old palace. There we'll meet Mora and Atarkus and many others. You will see things you haven't dreamed existed on this planet. Areeba is ready to strike for freedom!"

Lolan's eyes sparkled. But it was not entirely the revolution he was thinking of. "They knew about me?" he jerked.

Irak nodded, made an adjustment in the flight. "But none of us ever dared tell you of our plans until we knew exactly how you stood. If you had become a true Mar-

tian, we wanted you always to remain ignorant."

Silence came into the rocket ship. They were soaring along above a thick blanket of yellowish clouds. Irak's hand sent them plummeting down into the clear air beneath. Directly below them a cluster of crumbling buildings topped a hill in the north section of the city. Ruin had laid its bony hand over all, tumbling towers and cornices back into the dust from which they had sprung. Squarely in the midst of it the ship settled to a landing. Memory troubled Lolan at sight of the old palace.

Irak sprang out. "Follow me!" he shot at Lolan. They hurried into a roofless room of magnificent size, passing through it into a small room still partially covered. The captain found a ring in the floor, beneath a litter of rubbish. It yielded to insistent tugging, to reveal a flight of stairs sliding away into dim obscurity. Irak flashed a light into the depths and descended. Wondering strangely, Lolan followed.

A half hour passed, while steps blended into winding corridors and corridors changed back into stairs. Lolan's head was spinning by the time they reached a heavy bronze door. Irak flashed a smile. "Now—watch!" he breathed. His thumb flattened on a button.

Seconds dragged out. Nothing happened. But . . . was the door moving? A crack of light split down the middle of the portal. It widened, and suddenly the two parts drew wide and light and sound flooded through them. Lolan started. Dumbly he moved ahead. What he saw made his legs wobbly with astonishment.

**B**ELOW them, in a spacious, high-vaulted hall, thousands of men were at work with various machines. At one end of the room a continual stream of Venusians filed through one door, past a long table where workers were doling out some kind of apparatus, and back through another door. The clank of stamp machines, the scream of drill-presses, the whine of lathes, blended into a confused wail. And over all was the roar of the underground river, that flowed between black banks squarely through the middle of the cavern.

Questions sprang to Lolan's lips, but

Irak stifled them. "Come along," he ordered. "Others can explain better than I."

A winding path led down the wall of the place. At the bottom they turned left and found their way to where a large crowd of men were in noisy conference with two persons in their midst. Irak raised his voice in a triumphant shout. Instantly the babble broke. Irak bowed low as Atarkus emerged from the crowd.

"It is done, Emperor! I bring you—Prince Lolan!"

Unnameable feelings swept over Lolan as a great cry went up. Before he could move, he was surrounded by a laughing, shouting crowd that grew steadily larger. Their words were only a confused sound in his ears, but he knew what they meant: That he was whole-heartedly welcomed back into the race from which he had been stolen so long ago!

Mora came to his side, then, flushed and happy. "We sent for you," she said, "as soon as we learned you had been imprisoned. We have wanted so long to tell you of our plans. We—we need you."

"But we were afraid," Atarkus frowned. "It is with joy that we receive you, Prince, but . . . sadness has awaited your coming."

The exuberance that had buoyed Lolan up fled from beneath him and left him on the rock-bottom of unpleasant reality. "For what part I've had in your misery, I humbly beg forgiveness," he apologized. "But—this cavern . . . the machines: what do they mean?"

Atarkus' thin form drew up stiffly. His eyes swept the length of the vast room. "They mean the revolution is here! Tomorrow—at high noon!"

Through the crowd ran a tremor of excitement. Faces that wore graven looks of hopelessness flamed eagerly. Tired eyes sparkled.

"Revolution!" Lolan's word was a harsh, incredulous gasp. "But you have no weapons! No—no chance, against Arzt's legions of trained murderers!"

"We have weapons," Atarkus grunted. "But I wanted more time. Now, word has come that since your escape that butcher is running wild. Men and women are being shot down in their homes while soldiers search for you. The slightest

word of reproach is sufficient to condemn a man to the Holes, or to instant death. We can wait no longer. In a few days my people will be so cowed even I cannot lead them to the battle."

"But your weapons?" Lolan inquired eagerly.

Atarkus led the way to where the line of hurrying Venusians were being given small, copper-colored articles like tiny drummajors' batons. He picked one up and handed it to Lolan. "Try it!" he offered.

The prince regarded it curiously. He found a small trigger on one side. Training it on the wall twenty feet away, he fired. After a moment a round spot of phosphorescence appeared, that gradually turned red, then crumbled away. Slowly he handed the gun back to Atarkus.

"Well?" the Emperor inquired eagerly. "Do you think we're unarmed now, with four out of five Venusians owning one of these?"

Lolan drew his own weapon and directed it on the wall. He fired, the charge instantly crashing against the wall and tearing a ragged hole in it. He was white-lipped when he turned back. "There is your answer. Against these—these toys of yours, the Martian guns will be like long-range cannons. No, my friends. If this is the best you have to offer, the revolution is doomed before it starts!"

## V

THE shocked hush seemed to reach to all parts of the room. Lolan's thoughts were bitter ones. They concerned the thing that had cursed his people for centuries. Their childish inability to think a problem through, their pathetic attempts to fight back against their aggressors. Now those qualities had doomed them again to misery.

Atarkus was muttering to himself. "We—we thought they would work if we could get within ten or fifteen feet of them."

"But how are you going to approach that close when *their* guns are effective at two hundred feet?" Lolan countered. Idly he glanced at the piles and piles of ray pistols still being doled out. "How do they operate? Draw on the Martian power station, I suppose?"

Mora pointed at a massive apparatus at

the upper end of the hall. "Electronic power," she told him. "We generate our own power. As long as the turbines are running, the guns will operate."

Lolan's eyes went a little wide at that. He scratched his head, scowled, then walked off a little. He whirled about and came back to them. "That gives me a clue! The Martian-guns also draw from a central station. Only it's a radioactive type of power. Underneath the barracks there's a huge mass of *radite*. If that stuff were carried off, they'd have guns no more effective than water pistols!"

Irak snorted. "Who's going to carry it off? It weighs tons. I've seen it. It's like a great lump of radium. If you get too close, even, you'll be poisoned."

"We couldn't carry it off—in its present form! But there is a large, unused sewer hole in a room near it. If we could break it up, using workmen's lead suits, it might be possible to drop it into the underground river. Contact with the water would result in an explosion that would destroy its radioactivity."

Atarkus licked his lips. "Would this be possible? Could anyone get that close to it without being caught?"

"We could try!" Lolan gave back. "If the plan succeeded—well, we number twenty thousand in Areeba to the Martians' two. Once their weapons were destroyed, the city would be ours!"

"Then it must be attempted!" Atarkus raised his fist high. "Irak—call the leaders. We must lay our plans tonight, for the struggle tomorrow!"

They met in a little alcove off the main room, ten men whose grim countenances stamped them as men ready to die for the cause. Lolan sensed immediately, as they took places around a long table, that he was being looked to as their leader. And old Atarkus willingly fell away to make room for younger, more dynamic blood.

When all were quiet, Prince Lolan stood up. It came to him strongly, the feeling that everything, the fate of every soul on Venus, hinged on what happened in this little room tonight. His voice came gravely, freighted with importance.

"I won't try to deceive you for one instant that our battle is going to be easy," he told them sternly. "It isn't. The odds are a hundred to one against us. But I

will tell you this: The game is worth it! If we win Areeba, all Venus is ours. With improved weapons, the Martians' own, we'll be able to descend on the smaller settlements and conquer them before they know what has happened here. Then there will be the task of building up a space fleet. We can do it. If Mars sends a new army out to re-capture us, they'll find us ready, trained in their own modes of warfare and as brutal as they themselves. I have a theory that once we have won our independence, progress on Venus will be different. My experience has proved that all the Venusian lacks for a complete, balanced fighting personality is an abundance of ultraviolet light. We can provide that artificially, in street-lights, in the nursery, everywhere. It will be the beginning of the greater Venus. Yes, the game is worth the risk. We have all to win . . . nothing to lose!"

Vesh-Tu, a squat, hairy little man, leaned forward. "But how are we to do it, Prince? The *radite* is guarded, is it not?"

"I have a plan—" Lolan murmured thoughtfully. "We can enter, I believe, by the sewers, following the river upstream to the holes and climbing them by their ladders. They will probably know immediately what we are doing, when their machines and guns begin to lose power. But by that time I hope to have the army mostly concentrated on the south side.

"How?" Irak demanded flatly.

"By starting fires, riots, dynamiting buildings—everything we can think of. Then, when the soldiers have been decoyed into the midst of our people, we will have destroyed the last of the *radite* and the revolution will begin in earnest!"

Atarkus rubbed his hands. "Suppose we set a zero hour—say twelve o'clock, for the time for fighting to begin. It would make for a concerted, simultaneous outbreak all over the city."

Lolan nodded grimly. "Twelve o'clock. I will need three men to help me. Irak, Vesh-Tu, and you, Atarkus. The rest of you had better go back, now, to pass the word. We strike at high noon—and we strike hard!"

**D**AWN came, but only by their watches did those four who fought their way up the treacherous, slippery banks of the

subterranean river realize it. They stumbled along in darkness complete except for the feeble glow of hand torches. At ten o'clock they reached a spot where refuse of all kinds had collected on the bank. They sent light spraying the roof of the cavern. A honeycomb of holes broke its rough expanse.

Lolan read the labels crudely painted beside each. His heart gave a bound as he found the one he sought. Nimbly he ran up the iron rungs in the wall, then swung hand over hand to the hole and paused in its entrance, over the roaring torrent below. The others were following more slowly. Atarkus came haltingly, handicapped by his years. At length all were ascending the inky tunnel.

Four times they were forced to stop and rest. It was gruelling work. Their hands were rubbed raw by the pitted surface of the iron ladder. Over an hour had elapsed when they reached a flat iron plate that covered the hole. Eleven o'clock! An hour left. Lolan trembled with impatience.

Wedging himself securely on the ladder, he forced upward on the plate. Dim light flowed into the tunnel. With his nerves crying for caution, he shoved the plate aside and crawled forth. Gun in fist, he shot his glance about the small room.

The others emerged with bloody hands and dirty clothes, tired to the bone, but eager for whatever lay ahead. Prince Lolan paced to the door. "We're in luck!" he hissed. "No guards around. Now to find protective armor and go to work!"

THEY found the heavy suits used by workmen in a room near the the ramp leading down to the *radite* deposit. When they had crawled into them, they could hardly walk. Constructed of heavy rubber and slabs of lead, each one weighed over two hundred pounds. Helmets provided poor vision through thick, murky glass. But the outfits would be all that stood between them and death in the *radite* pit.

Now they were staggering down the ramp and through a wide door. All four recoiled from the sight that struck their eyes. On gigantic insulators, a huge lump of blazing diamond seemed to repose. Even through colored glass it pained the eyes to look at it. The walls and floor all about it glowed with the same supernal brilliance.

Tiny white flame ran ceaselessly over the jagged surface of the stone.

Lolan squinted at his watch. "Eleven-fifteen!" he blurted. "Can we do it in forty-five minutes?"

"We can if we've got to!" Vesh-Tu grunted. "How do we move the blessed thing?"

The prince drew his gun. "Stand back," he snapped. "This should break it down into convenient sizes!" He levelled the gun, squeezed the trigger twice.

A convulsive roar shook the very walls. For an entire minute, every man in the room was blinded. When they could see again, it was to regard the crumbled remains that strewed the floor. No pieces larger than a good-sized book remained. But when they tried to lift them, they discovered the chunks weighed as much as corresponding pieces of gold! Staggering under their burdens, they ascended the ramp with their small loads and hurried to the sewer opening.

One after the other, four pieces tumbled in. Tensely they waited for the detonation. It came, a rumbling roar that drove a blast of air into their faces. Lolan grinned bleakly. "Their guns are just that much less powerful!" he promised. "Now if we can just clear up all that stuff in time—"

At a wabbling run they staggered back to the job. It went like that for a half hour, while the litter of shattered *radite* grew smaller and smaller. Lolan's watch showed a quarter to twelve. He thought of the thousands of Venusians out on the streets, waiting to act . . . thought of Mora, ready to lead her little group. Then there came the sound that drove all other thoughts from his mind. The tramp of running feet!

Lolan acted instinctively. "Keep it up!" he shouted through his mask. "Irak and I have guns. We'll stand them off somehow!"

Fear shot through the pit like an electric charge. Lolan and Irak struggled for speed as they ran up the incline. The sound of voices and footfalls was louder. They made it past the room where the *radite* was being disposed of. That door must be kept available, or Arzt's victory was certain. On down the hall they plunged, around a turn, into another. . . . Their running steps locked in a halt. Arzt and his crew were racing toward them a hundred feet ahead!

THE shooting broke out simultaneously. Rock dust filled the tunnel from the battering of force-bolts. Arzt's voice struck through the sounds, bellowing orders. Lolan and Irak were back of the corner, now, waiting—

Two Martians raced up, prodded by their leader's hoarse screams. They never fired their guns, for the Venusians chopped them down in full stride. Lolan tore his mask off. "Won't need these any more," he grunted. "The job's up to them now. If I go out, it's not going to be in that smelly thing."

In back of them he could hear Atarkus and Vesh-Tu's labored breathing. From time to time there came the deep, thunderous explosions that meant the work was going on. Lolan darted a glance at his watch. Five minutes to twelve!

Now they pressed back against the wall in wait for another pair who raced up. The Martians plunged into their sights. Triggers were squeezed, guns steadied. But the shots, when they came, were feeble. Beside Lolan the wall shuddered slightly and a trickle of rocks slid down it. He watched the man he had hit stagger back, screaming. It took another shot to finish him.

A new tenseness came into the tunnel. Every man present, Martian or Venusian, knew what was happening. The last of the *radite* was being disposed of. In another five minutes Arzt's hordes would be no more than a handful among an army of vengeance-driven natives.

The seconds slogged slowly through Prince Lolan. He was waiting, hoping—then his hopes were dashed as twenty-five Martians raced concertedly for the pair of them. Arzt was sacrificing everything to stop them.

Irak began to swear excitedly. "This gun—the thing won't work fast enough, Lolan! Can't stop them with these."

"Then we'll use the new guns!" The idea took him so swiftly he fumbled through two seconds getting his little copper disintegrator into position. A long blue

serpent of flame licked out at the Martians. Where it touched, men withered and went down without a sound. Arzt roared his anger. He flung his useless weapon with all his might at his former subordinate.

"Damn your Venusian heart!" he screamed. "You can't stop us! Can't—"

The words choked off. Irak had cut him down with a single shot. Silence dwelt in the tunnel, and through it came a hoarse cry:

"Lolan! It's done! The last of it's gone. Were—were we in time?"

Lolan sank back against the wall. He let his eyes fill with the ghastly remains of his former underlings. "Yes," he muttered to himself. "Yes! They're—finished!"

THERE was jubilation throughout all Areeba that day. The scene in the tunnel had been duplicated everywhere. Martians, one minute brutal and ruthless, became craven cowards the next. There was not a man of them alive by night.

At sundown, Lolan stood with Mora, Atarkus, and the others high in command at the ruins of the palace. The sun had broken through the perpetual clouds to cast a golden fog over everything. The beauty of it seemed to hold them all.

"It's symbolic," Lolan told the Emperor. "Symbolic of the grandeur to come for Venus. I see a future for you as the greatest emporer our world has ever known."

Atarkus shook his head. "Not for me, my boy. For you! I am old, ready to leave the struggle to the young. Irak, who could be a more fitting ruler for Venus than the prince we lost and gained again?"

Irak's ugly face grinned. "No one. But an Emperor must have an Empress! Could that not be arranged too?"

Atarkus saw the flush on his daughter's face, the corresponding color in Prince Lolan's cheeks. "Arranged!" he grunted. "That's been done a long time. It was arranged the day Lolan came back from Mars!"





# THE TANTALUS DEATH

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

"Give us water, or we perish!" But the Conclave of Nations denied the Red Planet's frantic plea. So began the Reign of Terror . . . a Martian judgement that plunged the Earth into hideous chaos.

THE Master Conclave of the Sectional Governors of the World State was in its first day of session. The Speaker, about to call for a motion of adjournment,

rose, looked about the packed tiers of seats as if searching for someone. Relief came to his face—and was replaced by annoyance as the huge, double doors swung open.

A being, resplendent in colorful uniform, of human shape but twelve feet tall, entered.

In the resigned silence that followed, the doorman announced,

"Olduk, the Martian ambassador!"

All eyes followed the massive, wrinkled old form as it made its way slowly through the aisles.

The Speaker bit his lip. He said, "The Conclave welcomes you, Olduk. We had feared that you would not be present."

Olduk paused and bowed. He said, in his guttural, unnatural tones, "Olduk thanks you."

"You wished to speak before the assembly?"

"Yes, please. The rostrum may I use?"

"Yes," said the Speaker, "the rostrum you may use."

A titter of laughter spread through the tiered seats.

Olduk paid none or small attention, even to the whisperings of two secretaries that his receptive, large ears picked up.

"Why does he keep up with this farce?" one asked. "Every year he gets up on the rostrum, and makes a speech, asking, as usual, for water. He's been denied exactly ten times."

"He'll get it in the neck this time," Olduk heard the other say knowingly. "The Spanish and Japanese Sectional Governors have had several bills thrown out this session, and they're spoiling for an argument. And whatever they say, they'll be speaking for the world."

Olduk—called jokingly the Old Duck—wended his way between the aisles toward the rostrum, drawing his cape about him. The cape was not an affectation. He realized that as a Martian he possessed several unhuman appendages which human beings did not care to look upon.

He faced the session, his wrinkled old face expressionless, though his double-lidded eyes conveyed the seriousness with which he faced his problem.

"Honorable Speaker," he said, bowing to the Speaker. "Honorable fellow delegates," he added, and bowed low. "I drink to you." He seized a beaker of water in a horny hand, and drained it in a single gulp.

He set the beaker down. His reddish eyes swept the assembly.

He said, "I am ever thankful you me to

speak allow. Think, I will tell you what I wish, fellow delegates.

"Difficult me to talk this language, though here I have lived on Earth twenty years, making friends with Earthmen. I am not as I was in leaving Mars. I am changed with sundry operations, that I may live here well. Thus my voice is hard to speak, and harder still to learn difficult language. Laughing I will not like, please?"

He paused. His abnormally receptive ears again picked up the whisperings of the two secretaries.

"He's said exactly the same thing the past five sessions."

Olduk said in his impersonal voice:

"Before I make my plea for the water my planet needs, let me tell a myth that I read with enjoyment. It is the story of Tantalus, fellow delegates. Tantalus was placed by the gods in a river of purest water; when he wished to drink, recede the water would. So his thirst for ages tortured him.

"Poor Tantalus," said Olduk.

He seized the refilled beaker, and drained it at a single gulp.

"Shall Mars be Tantalus? Or shall Earth be Tantalus?"

"Mars is Tantalus," a whisper floated from the gallery.

The laughter came again, a little insolently this time.

THE Japanese Sectional governor rose, and said, sucking in his breath, "Why does not the thirsty Olduk speak, instead of drinking all the Speaker's water?"

This time the laughter was more open. The speaker rapped with his gavel, and order was restored.

Olduk said, "There is more water on Earth than five billion Olduks could drink.

"But I will speak, as I have spoken years in and years over.

"I shall review the history of things. Forty-five years ago great swarms of Martians descended on Earth and engaged in war. They wished to conquer Earth. Fortunately succeeded not. There became a hatred between the two peoples. This hatred has endured, without reason."

"Without reason?" said the Japanese governor.

"Doubtless," said Olduk, "you have neglected to follow history, of own people



and of what occurred before Martians made war. Not until after the war did Martians know that Earthmen could be peaceful. Before the war, Earthmen slaughtered great numbers of Martians. So Martians did not feel bad when they wished to slaughter numbers of Earthmen."

"There was the second war," sarcastically.

"The second war the war of water, as the first. Earth no good for us, see? Wished water only. The second war we fought because Earth would not sell us water any price at; so we would conquer her and levy water tribute. Fortunately did not succeed. Try more friendly means, which is why I, Olduk and seven of associates, changed by operations from real Martians, are here."

Olduk paused. He resumed carefully, cocking his massive head to one side.

"Come to Earth, I and seven. Give Earth scientific secrets. Learn Earth language and customs. Prove friendliness for water."

The Spanish governor rose, cleared his throat. "Bribes!" he said loudly.

"Bribes?" said Olduk.

"Bribes! Gentlemen, Olduk has made his plea for ten years, and for ten years, in the best interests of the World State, we have refused him. Why? Because if you sell the Martians water, their population will increase to the point where they are able to conquer Earth. Remember that it was our numbers and not our science that won out over the Martians in the two wars.

"This question has been an annoyance! From now on, I vote no on the subject, and move to have this question off our hands for good. Furthermore, I move that the Act which gave the Martians the right to sit on the Master Conclave be stricken out of the World Constitution!"

Olduk said, "My people will die—" when every member of the Conclave rose and shouted out his agreement with the Spanish governor.

Olduk drew his cape tighter around his twelve-foot body.

He said, "Then I have been refused forever. But I have no feelings of enmity. Allow me fully to explain situation once more, so that you may possibly feel sorry for my people. We are million in number—ideal, yes? Not canned like sardines on Earth, yes? Million enough, fortunately. But

without water, in century, none. See? Our birth rate falls.

"But no, my people do not suffer of thirst. There become less people to drink. But it is cruel of Earth to kill a race because they hate. Therefore, all read story of Tantalus—interesting, see?"

"Poor Tantalus," in his expressively expressionless voice. "Poor Tantalus. Many persons of Earth would not like to be Tantalus, thus receive justice reserved for poets."

Olduk walked over to the Speaker and said something to him. The Speaker frowned, and then resignedly signaled an orderly.

"A gallon of water for Mr. Olduk."

The session erupted with a wave of general laughter.

The water was brought. Olduk placed the beaker to his thin lips, tossed the contents off.

He swept the assembly with his eyes.

His left arm—or what appeared to be a left arm, so covered with the cape was it—fumbled at his right wrist.

He said once more, gutturally, "Yes, poor Tantalus."

He stepped down from the rostrum, and with slow dignified step left the conclave room.

THE hundred odd members of the Conclave settled back in their seats after Olduk had gone. The session was resumed.

The Speaker, listening to the monotonous reading of a bill, reached absently for the water carafe, tilted it. The water did not pour. The Speaker tilted the carafe further—and further—suddenly the water made its exit.

It fell from the carafe, the entire contents, struck against the glass, knocked the glass over, bounced off the table into the air, and thence to the floor.

There the water, a half-gallon of it, tightly rolled into a neat, compact sphere, bounced up and down several times, and then subsided on the floor as clear and flawless as crystal glass.

The Speaker stared at it.

The members of the conclave stared at it. The Speaker turned to the gaping orderly.

"That's a glass ball," he said harshly, accusingly.

"No, it isn't," the orderly chattered. "That's water! I filled the carafe with water."

The Speaker looked at it again, and then walked to the sphere, the Conclave watching him in fascination.

The Speaker scooped up the ball in two hands. Then he tried to drop it. He couldn't. His fingers seemed curled around the ball, crushed close together. His hands couldn't draw apart.

He tried to shake the sphere away. He tried harder, and then violently, working himself into a sudden frenzy. The sphere of water clung to his hands, and his hands were locked as effectively as if handcuffs had been placed around the wrists. He got control of himself and turned to face the Conclave, white-faced.

"It can't be water," he said hoarsely, "but I think it is!"

And looking at the glass ball, he was conscious of a sudden thirst; but he knew he couldn't drink, although he held in his hands four times more water than he needed to quench his thirst.

**I**N the Martian Legation Building, Olduk faced his seven associates.

"It is done," he said, in the Martian dialect of his native state. "The Earthmen have chosen their hell and will soon experience it. You have your tickets? Then go at once."

The youngest of the attaches said pleadingly, "Sir, we can't go and leave you. Who knows how long the Earthmen will hold out?"

"All that will happen will happen to Olduk. Go, before you are refused permission to leave. Tell our people they are to be relentless, until the Earthmen give in. Now go."

The attaches no longer questioned his commands. Olduk was left alone.

The gong sounded on his television screen; Olduk threw the switch. The face of the manager of World Broadcasters appeared.

"You will appear and speak in two minutes," he said. Olduk stood before the television screen, waiting until the proper second. He had planned the time of this speech and the "hell" chosen by Earth would not begin until he was well into it. The Speaker of the Conclave had not yet

thirsted. The moment came, and Olduk was introduced briefly, as his image broadcasted.

"Olduk, the Martian ambassador, speaking for his people—"

Olduk said gutturally, "Olduk greets you, people of Earth, and regrets that he cannot drink with you.

"All read story of Tantalus, people of Earth. An old Grecian myth it is, come true. Interesting, see?"

"Olduk is sorry. Will you believe Olduk? He is sorry. Olduk says, please do not touch water. Please do not touch water. . . ."

**T**HE diving champion of the world puffed out his chest, feigning complete nonchalance as five thousand admiring people looked up at him where he stood as resplendant as an angel on the diving platform.

"Ladeeeeeees and gentlemannnnnnnn!" the loudspeaker blared. "Pedro Morestes, the handsomest man in the world, and the most perfect physical specimen by the Olivar Test, is about to break the world's diving record of all time. Four hundred feet lie between him and the glistening surface of this world-famed pool!

"Watch him, hold your breath, ladees and gentleman, there he goooooooosssss—"

Pedro Morestes ran with light graceful steps toward the end of the diving board. The board flung him upward, and he seemed to stop for an infinitesimal second, poised like a bird, with the pool far below, and gasping people staring upward.

One of those people watching had his wrist radio tuned to World Broadcasters.

"Please," said Olduk's clearly audible radio voice, "do not touch water. If things strange happen to water, do not touch, please?"

Pedro Morestes began his dazzling drop downward, twisting, twining, going through all the intricate convolutions that four hundred feet would allow him.

Now! A loop, a twist, straighten out for the last fifty feet, cut the water as clean as an arrow cutting the air.

Pedro Morestes eyes popped. A hoarse scream escaped his lips.

Where was the flat surface that should receive him?

Where were the little wavelets that usu-

ally betokened the presence of water?

Why did the entire pool bulge up in the middle, and drop at the sides?

Why was it that the whole pool had been replaced by an immense *hemisphere of glass*?

Pedro Morestes screamed, squirmed, twisted, came down with a bone crushing shock on the bulging surface, his posterior foremost.

He bounced upward for fifty feet, fell again, bounced again, fell, bounced, fell—and was locked, flat on his back, by an invisible vice that not only held him rigid, but threatened to crush him from all sides.

The crowd stared in pure fright. The pool of water had become—a hemisphere of glass? And Pedro Morestes, world's diving champion, lay atop that gleaming sphere, ribs and one leg broken, unable to move a muscle. . . .

**"D**AMN that kid," said Sam, throwing his newspaper to the floor.

"I wanna drink," wailed the damned kid, from the bedroom.

"All right, keep your pants on," growled Sam surlily. He went out to the kitchen, leaving the radio on. It had been jabbering for some time, something about Olduk.

"Please," said the radio voice of Olduk, "do not touch water. Tell your friends, my friends, not to touch water. . . ."

Sam got a glass out of the cupboard, held it under the faucet, turned the faucet on.

The water came out, well enough, but it wasn't water.

"What the hell," Sam said incredulously.

A big drop was suspended from the faucet, was growing bigger as the faucet fed it.

Sam watched while it became six inches, a foot in diameter.

The glass fell from his paralyzed fingers. "What the hell!" he yelled hoarsely.

"I wanna glass of water," the damned kid wailed.

Olduk said, clearly and distinctly, "I am sorry you are not able to drink, see? . . ."

"All right, you'll get your water," Sam panted excitedly, only vaguely conscious that the radio was going.

He watched the spheroid grow and grow. Still suspended from the faucet, it touched the sink. Then the "drop" grew up around

the faucet until the faucet was completely enclosed.

The drop began to overlap the sink, still maintaining a spherical shape. Suddenly there was a loud, metallic *pop*. The drop broke away from the faucet, of its own weight, fell to the linoleumed floor with a dull barrrrroooooommmmmmm.

It was three feet in diameter; and another one was growing from the faucet.

"I wanna drink of water," said the damned kid, waddling into the kitchen, rubbing his eyes.

Those eyes brightened as they saw the gleaming sphere. A grimy hand reached out and touched it. Against his will, the whole arm of the kid was drawn against the sphere, and the rest of the body was drawn with it, legs snapped together, one arm locked to its side, the other curled to the breaking point over its head.

Sam roared but he was too late. The bewildered kid's nose touched the sphere, and his whole face was drawn, in, so that all air was cut off.

Sam grabbed hold of him, and pulled frantically, madly, until he was panting. Then he let go, screaming, and ran for the cupboard. It was some seconds before he found an ax. By the time he got back, the second drop had fallen, had merged with the first, forming a sphere five feet in diameter, with the kid plastered against it.

Sam swung the ax. The sharp blade hit, actually penetrated the sphere. Sam yelled. The ax was literally sucked in. Sam refused to let go, and his hands went into the water after the ax. There was a terrible contractile force on his wrists. Then something seemed rushing up his arms. The something enclosed his body with the speed of a striking snake.

The next thing he knew, water had smothered his nose, his mouth, and he was *inside*, looking out.

He was staring into the smothered face of the damned kid.

Shortly after that he drowned. He couldn't get out. Another drop fell, another, and another, another, another, adding themselves to the original mass. . . .

**O**N the high seas, the S.S. *Wilcox* battered through rising, flooding seas.

The captain stood on the bridge, yelling orders to his men below.

The first mate flung water from his face, gritted, "We'll never make port."

A sailor came up the companionway, steadying himself on the handrail.

"There's water pouring through a hole in a forward section," he gasped hoarsely. "We can't caulk it. She's sinking at the stem."

"Mr. Jones," said the captain, "sound the signal to abandon ship."

The first officer said to himself, "In these seas?" But he obeyed and went down to the cargo hold where the alarm apparatus was stationed. Above the roar of the elements sounded seven short hoarse blasts, and a long one. The "all hands on deck" signal vibrated through the ship.

The captain watched while sailors donned lifebelts, jumped to boat stations. Boats were swung out, and eased down by the rail. Passengers, herded by calm officers, came on to the deck. The ship gave another sickening roll. A lifeboat was dashed to matchsticks.

"It's no use," the quartermaster said hoarsely. He gripped the rail, staring out over the raging sea, where mountainous waves were sending the S.S. *Wilcox* to her doom.

The captain said slowly, "I wish I were what Cadmus wished he was. I wish I could command the waves of the sea to vanish."

. . . An astounding thing happened.

As if a gigantic beer skimmer had been run over the surface of the sea in all directions, the tops of the waves seemed abruptly to round. The troughs filled, the crests dropped. The roar of water against the flanks of the ship ceased. The waves ceased, though the wind still roared, and whined.

The quartermaster's eyes widened in startled terror, and he looked askance at his captain.

The captain said blankly, "God or the Devil or . . . ?!"

The waves were gone. The S.S. *Wilcox* ceased pitching. A sailor came up and told the captain that although the hole was still there, the water of the open sea visible through it had seemed to turn into a rigid surface that wouldn't let the water in. The ship was no longer sinking.

As far as the eye could see the Atlantic Ocean was a calm smooth stretch of water,

with the inflexible rigidity of glass. . . .

THE champion of the world was saved by the bell. His excited, panic-stricken manager picked up a pitcher of water, and threw the entire contents in the heavy-weight's face. The entire contents was in the form of a hard sphere of water. The sphere struck the dazed, almost unconscious fighter on the forehead. It was the only case on record of a fighter being knocked out between rounds. . . .

"I AM sorry you are not able to drink, when there is so much water around you. But you must not touch it, see? Olduk must not touch it either. Tell all your friends. Thank you," Olduk concluded.

He bowed and turned away, leaving the station manager to do the rest.

Then he placed his twelve foot body into a specially made chair, and waited. The waiting was not long. A knock came on the door, and the door was thrust open. Five men in civilian clothes stood there.

"You, Olduk," said one in an ugly tone. "You're under arrest."

The five men circled him.

Olduk drew his cape tighter about him. "Very well," he complied, and led the way out of the room, thinking wistfully of his native planet.

HE was taken before the chief of the secret service of the World State. The Speaker of the Master Conclave, and the Japanese and Spanish sectional Governors were there. He was forced to a seat.

Olduk's eyes rested on the sphere of the water in the Speaker's hands. His eyes flickered briefly. The Speaker glared at him wildly.

"The longer I hold this thing," he whispered, panting, "the thirstier I get. And I can't drink! What will I do?"

Olduk said emotionlessly, "Honorable sir, you will have to hold it until there is an agreement to give my people water. Now we are all Tantaluses."

The iron-gray individual who was the chief of the secret service, ran his tongue around in his dry mouth.

"You did this?" he said huskily.

"Yes," said Olduk.

The man took a paper off his desk, unfolded it in front of Olduk's eyes.

Olduk read the headline emotionlessly:

**WORLD IN TURMOIL;  
DRINKING IMPOSSIBLE**

"I did that, yes," said Olduk quietly. "Many people will die. Tantalus, yes? But there is a Tantalus on Mars, too."

The iron-gray man struck him harshly across the mouth.

"How did you do it?" he rasped.

"A water-tight ship lies buried ten miles beneath the surface of the Atlantic Ocean. A simple radio signal started the mechanism that eventually released the force."

"What force?"

"The force that will make it impossible for people of Earth to drink, honorable sir."

"What signal will make the mechanism stop?" Again Olduk was struck across the face, harshly, brutally. A thin yellow ichor started to run down Olduk's impassive face.

"The signal is known only to my people on Mars. Thus it was arranged."

"You're a liar, Olduk!"

The man lit a cigar, and while the Speaker turned away, sickened, he brought it closer to Olduk, meanwhile talking rapidly.

"Liners are stranded in the ocean, unable to move. Their passengers can't drink. The power house at Niagara is useless; the water comes over the falls in drops as big as houses. People are beginning to suffer from thirst. I know a Martian named Olduk who's going to burn alive if he doesn't tell us how to stop the mechanism."

The cigar contacted, lingered. There was a sulphurous odor.

Tiny muscles on the Martian's face began to tense. Sweat broke out on his face.

"You cannot harm me," he said steadily. "Can only kill me. If you kill me, mankind die. We of Mars have then a planet of water to ourselves. That's my warning. Heed me."

Fifteen minutes passed. Olduk's face was a mass of blood and burns. Every nerve in his body was quivering. He had answered none of the questions hurled at him. He had refused to divulge the location of the buried ship. Finally his muscles relaxed, and his double-lidded eyes sagged shut.

The chief of the secret service said

ragingly, "Throw him into a cell, the dirty —! We'll work on him later!"

After Olduk was taken away, the iron-gray man looked at the Speaker.

"What do we do now?"

The Speaker looked in horror at the sphere of water in his hand. "We'll have to give in—"

"Damned if we will," the other snarled, pacing up and down. "If we could find out where that ship is, we could send a super-tension ship down and blow it to—" He stopped, his eyes lighting. He wheeled. "Didn't Olduk say 'ten miles' below the surface? Damn! There aren't many places that deep—" He snapped his fingers, and reached for a phone.

THREE hours later, a bullet-shaped rocket ship, able to withstand thousands of tons' pressure, and reinforced with an intangible force-field, fled away from the continent, bound for the Maracot Deep; for such was the first choice, and, as it happened, it was the last.

High above the ocean, the pilot turned the craft nose-down, and poured full power into his jets.

The craft plunged for the surface of the hard ocean, at frightful velocity; struck; penetrated; was under, velocity broken almost in three by the terrific impact. The ship bored down, powerful searchlights playing on swarms of startled fishes. Down, down. The pilot made an exclamation, grinned his triumph. Here, ten miles down, they saw the hulk of the ship that was causing such destruction in the world above.

The pilot signaled one of his subordinates. The man pulled a lever. The craft's entire load of super-explosives sank downward toward the menace.

The pilot sent his ship blasting for the surface. Seconds later he heard and felt the tremendous vibration that, he knew, heralded the end of the menace. He went toward the surface, and when within fifty feet of it, sent a blast of power into his jets.

The ship struck something, like a wall, hard, unyielding, and the pilot and his assistants were thrown against the instrument board. They recovered their senses.

The pilot looked at the other men.

"Ten tons of helio-hydrogen didn't do

the trick," he said softly. "What will? You know, I almost forgot. The science of the Martians is way ahead of ours. Naturally, that ship wouldn't be exactly tender. . . ."

He knew it was useless. He had no more explosives. He shoved every atom of power he had into his jets, but the ship could not move more than forty miles an hour under water. For a moment it seemed the blunt nose of the ship was going to penetrate the incredibly tough under-surface of that film, but no. . . .

The pilot said, grinning crookedly, "Say your prayers, boys, and here's hoping they give the Old Duck what he wants—quick."

Two days passed. Three billion people stared into the face of eternity. Rivers, lakes, oceans were full. There were reservoirs of clear, sparkling water, from which laboring pumps could take water, pumping it to homes, making it accessible, forcing it out of faucets.

But it was untouchable. The water came out in impenetrable spheres.

They lay like jewels in the homes of most people. People stood around and stared at them, longingly, yet not daring to touch them. They had heard several stories about people who *had* touched them.

Within the spheres, the water was clearly visible for what it was; which made it all the harder to resist. The world now knew, by the word of scientists, that nothing but a thin surface of molecules, strengthened by a million times, lay between them and the water their bodies thirsted for. Surface tension, acted upon by a strange force, broadcasted from a mechanism ten miles beneath the surface of the Atlantic.

Another day passed. The mills of industry, working by steam, and the things that depended on water, came to a halt. Power was weak, for it was fed from fast depleting accumulators. The tide machines were useless, for the ocean no longer fell or rose more than a foot in any one place.

Numberless ships were stranded on the oceans, their screws able to turn, but their bows unable to push against the enormous contractile force that the surface of the ocean possessed.

Crowds roved through the streets, aim-

less, purposeless, their voices dry, racking, their eyes bloodshot, cheeks sunken. Beer and soft drinks, the only drinkable liquids that were not affected, were selling for ten dollars a bottle. The supply was fast dwindling, and the price was being jacked up.

Water was all around them, but they were the children of Tantalus.

Newspapers began to demand, in stringent tones, that the situation be remedied. Crowds gathered outside the World Administration Building, shouting for water, and they were fully willing to go to the extreme of meeting the demands of the Martians to get it.

THE Speaker of the Master Conclave, and the Japanese and Spanish sectional governors, stood in a room on the upper floor of the World Administration Building.

The room was a kitchen.

On the floor lay a huge, polished, glistening drop of water.

"That's what it is, gentlemen," said the Speaker. "A drop of water, just what you'd expect if the surface tension of water increased a million times. The surface film acts like a tight skin or jacket surrounding a drop of water, and the jacket contracts down to the least possible area, a sphere. If you put your hands on it—the way I've got my hands on this damned *thing*—you increase the 'coastline,' and the surface film doesn't like that. It tries to decrease the coastline formed by your fingers, so your fingers are crushed together. If you managed to actually penetrate the film, and get your hands wet, the terrific capillary action of the molecules would cause the surface film to literally envelop you, and you'd be inside, and you couldn't get out. . . . What are we going to do about it?"

His face was drawn and haggard and sunken.

The Spanish Governor said hoarsely, "We couldn't give in, could we?"

"No!" the Japanese Governor lashed out savagely; but in a moment a fleeting smile crossed his face. "Send for Olduk," he said.

Olduk entered the room, unsteadily, supported by two plain-clothesmen. His face was clean of blood, but the little,

horrible marks inflicted on him were all too evident.

"You wished to see me?" he said in a hoarse whisper. His eyes were bloodshot.

"Yes. What do you want of Earth, explicitly?"

"Water, honorable sir. Water for my people. As much as we wish, when we wish it, at a reasonable price; and we also desire friendship, so that we may help each other."

The Japanese sucked in his breath, quivering angrily. "You want our friendship. Yet you do this to our people!"

"You do no less to my people, honorable sir. Olduk is sorry, see?" He weaved, caught onto a chair to support himself. His leathery, parchment face seemed more wrinkled and bloodless than ever before. His reddish eyes held a deep, pleading hope.

"We are children of Tantalus, all," he whispered. "It is not right that we live in a mythical Hades, see, honorable sirs? Give my people water—"

He pitched forward on his face. The Speaker started toward him, his eternal sphere of water in his hands, but the Japanese stopped him, held him back from the sprawling, twelve-foot figure.

He said, "Have you ever studied Martian psychology?"

"N-no," said the Speaker, puzzled.

"The theory is that they are incapable of dishonesty, and therefore they do not believe it exists. Of course, it's only a theory, and nobody believes it, but why couldn't we try it out?"

The Speaker was startled. "You mean we should give them our word, and then back out on it?"

"Yes," the Japanese sucked in his breath. He saw the hesitation on the Speaker's face, and said with icy, mocking disdain, "Are you going to give water to a race whose sole purpose will be to increase their population so they can conquer Earth? Think, fool! Do you want to hold that sphere of water in your hands forever?" He smirked. "In the interval of peace, we can go to the Maracot Deep, lift that sunken ship out without having to worry about a surface film. We can take it to dry land, and with a little work, cut the ship open, destroy the mechanism. With that destroyed—"

His contempt, and his reference to the maddening sphere of water the Speaker held, wilted the Speaker.

"We'll do it," he said slowly, casting an uneasy look at the sprawled Martian.

THIRTY minutes later, the three men watched the sphere of water in the Speaker's hands. A radiogram had been sent across 126,000,000 miles to Mars. Mars' answer, if it was affirmative and entirely trusting, would come not in the form of a radiogram but in the immediate return of Earth to its natural fluid state.

They watched the rigid sphere in fascination. Even now, the radio signal that would cause the mechanism to cease might be winging its way across space between two planets.

When the sphere broke, if it did, three billion thirsty human beings would drink with the maddening impatience of Tantalus himself, released from his eternal doom.

. . . The sphere seemed to quiver. Suddenly it sagged, flattened out without a sound, its sphericity gone. The Speaker uttered a cry, and dashed his hands to his face, gulping in as much of the precious stuff as he could before it dribbled away from his hands. The Japanese and Spanish Governors turned rapidly to faucets, and the water, clear, sparkling, normal, streamed out. . . .

For a short time the three of them were like animals. Then, gradually, they stopped drinking, and stood back, slightly ashamed.

The Spanish Governor said, suggestively, "We'd better get that ship fished out before the Martians realize they are not going to get water after all. Otherwise—"

The Speaker nodded. He turned away, to go into his study, when he stumbled over the prone body of Olduk, the Martian. A twinge of guilt assailed him. He stooped and turned Olduk over.

Olduk's double-lidded eyes were open. Olduk's skin was as dry as his native sands. Olduk was either dead or dying.

The Speaker troubledly called a doctor. The doctor made a brief examination, handling the body distastefully. Suddenly he stifed an exclamation.

"I can't believe this!" he said hoarsely. He got to his feet, stared first at the Speaker, then at Olduk again.

"Do you know what he died from?" he stammered. "Do you know, gentlemen!" And the Speaker knew.

**T**HE Master Conclave was again assembled, for the fourth and last day, its members well-watered, and well satisfied with themselves.

The Speaker said, standing on the rostrum where Olduk had stood four days before, "I want to make a short talk, and call for a standing vote.

"Earth has water again. We acquired it by a simple trick, that of dishonesty. I was fully to blame. Men are now at work in the Maracot Deep, in super-tension ships raising the Martian ship to the surface. There is no reason to doubt that a means to destroy the mechanism that caused so much trouble will be found. We won't have to keep our agreement with the Martians. I want to know if this action of mine meets with your approval."

The entire body stood to its feet.

"We were forced to it," the Japanese Governor said to the assembly at large.

The Speaker waved them to their seats again. "I did not call for a standing vote, yet. I have more to say before I ask for your final decision."

He resumed carefully, giving each word its proper significance.

"The Old Duck was a Martian—but in body he was not a Martian. He told us that. He had been changed with 'sundry operations,' so that he could live in this climate, so different from that of Mars.

Air pressure, oxygen content, moisture, content gravity. To each he was acclimated by surgical operations.

"Yes," continued the Speaker, something catching in his voice, "he was changed in such a way that the terrific amount of moisture in the atmosphere of the Earth could be taken care of by his body. In order to make that possible, *his twelve-foot body was given a capacity for water proportionately three times greater than that of any Terrestrial!*

"Gentlemen," said the Speaker, while an air of startled tenseness grew in the tiered seats, "Olduk died of thirst."

He was silent.

He said strainedly, "I wanted to know if my action of deceit met with your approval. I require a standing vote."

The Japanese Governor rose slowly. He had to. He sent a look at the Spanish Governor. The Spanish Governor kept his seat.

The Japanese Governor stood alone, like a monument to the thoughtless guilt of the others.

**T**HE Speaker sat that night before his desk, drinking a glass of water.

He said to the shadows, "I drink with you, Olduk!"

He slowly wrote out a treasury requisition, and in the space marked REASON FOR APPLICATION wrote: "For the free transportation of a gift of ten million gallons of water to the Martians, as a gesture of friendship from Earth."

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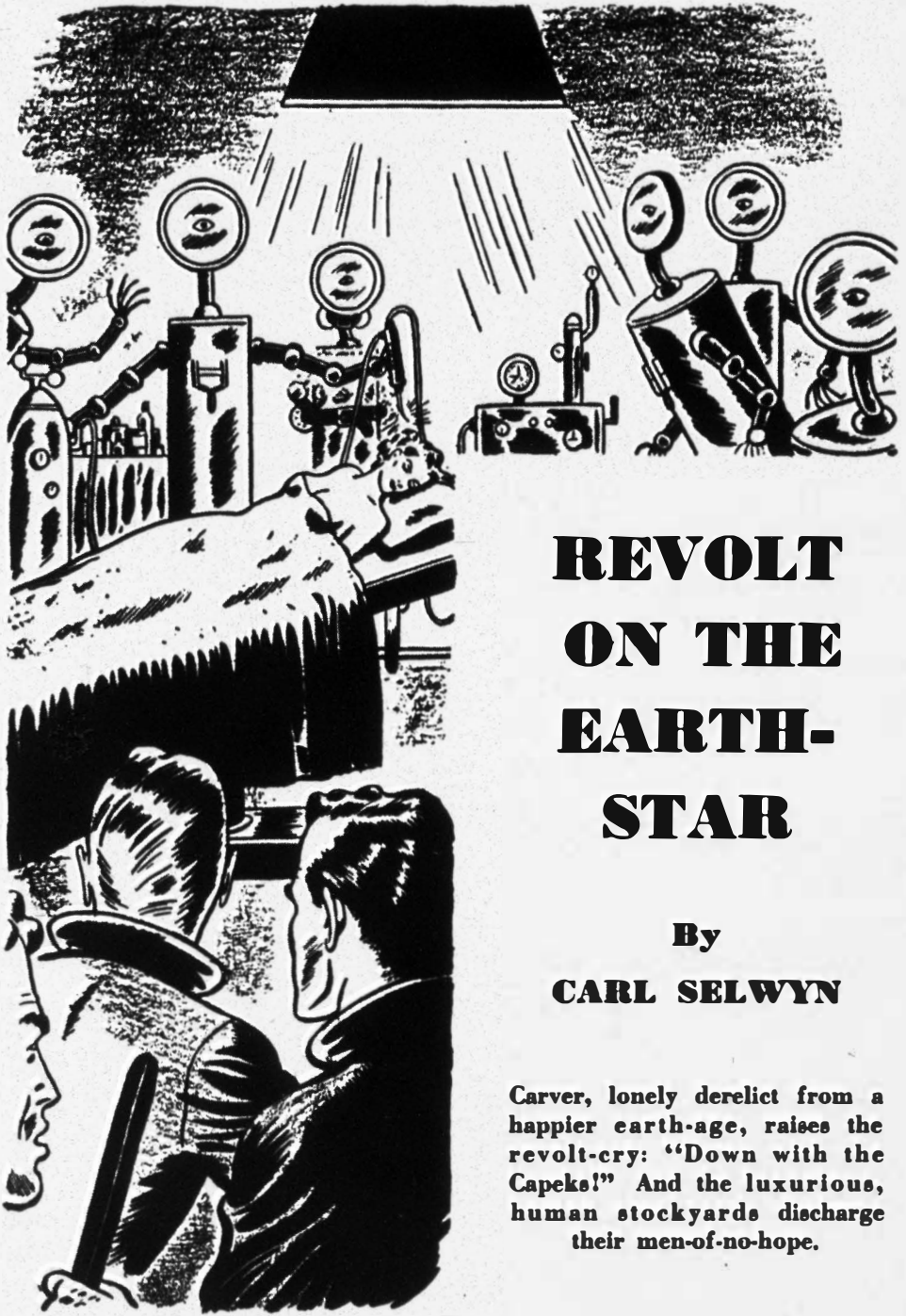
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# REVOLT ON THE EARTH- STAR

By  
**CARL SELWYN**

*Carver, lonely derelict from a happier earth-age, raises the revolt-cry: "Down with the Capeks!" And the luxurious, human stockyards discharge their men-of-no-hope.*

**R**OD CARVER panted heavily and the sweat froze on his brow. Depending on his ax work now, he swung again and again, chipped shallow holes into which he wedged trembling fin-

gers and pulled himself a little higher. Inch by precarious inch he crept up the sheer wall of the glacier, kicking his toes hard into the niches below. Chilling splinters flew down into his face as he chopped at the ice, high

over the jagged and glistening crevice.

Not much farther. Just a little more. The patch of gray lichen was but a few yards above him now. It was on a small ledge. He could rest there. He had not thought it was so far but he must be several hundred feet up by now.

Despite the biting wind, he was hot in the fur suit that covered his muscular body. Eyes half-closed against the stinging shower that fell upon him, he moved slowly upward. There was a little crack in the ice just above him. Rod swung hard with the ax and it stuck there. Securing a firm hold with his left hand and making sure of his feet, he tugged at the short handle. It held tightly. He joggled the handle back and forth, then jerked at it. It came loose suddenly. His arm flew back and his feet slipped beneath him. His face banged against the ice. Panic screamed in him as he dangled by one arm. Madly, he clawed the wall with his other hand, flailed with his feet. Numbing fear bathed his entire body in cold perspiration. Then a foot found support and he caught a niche with his right hand.

Rod clung there, weak and shaken, almost crying his thankfulness. Immediately upon the cessation of exertion, however, the cold crept upon him and he finally regained sufficient control to examine his plight. He had lost the ax. His mittens were slick and wet; constantly he stretched numbing fingers for a new grasp upon the faithless ice as a treacherous film of water formed beneath them.

The wind whipped about him, breathed mournfully in the frozen recesses of the silent valley below. The sweat of fear formed on Rod's forehead and he shuddered. Bugs or no bugs, he should have known better than to venture away from the rest of his friends alone.

He had left the advance base of the expedition for a short explorative jaunt, thinking he might pick up something new in the way of fauna, of which the bleak Antarctic wastes had little to offer. He had caught several large mosquitoes and, entranced by the desolate beauty of this weirdly distorted and quiet void, had wandered farther than he had intended. Then he had seen the little growth of lichen high on an icy crag. Thinking to add the specimen to his private collection, he had climbed the precipitous

wall, and here he was, trapped, without his ax, unable to move up or down. . . .

He pressed his young body against the ice as a freezing gale lashed about him in a swirl of snow. Far below, he could see his haversack beside the cliff.

"Lord!" he breathed. If he fell here they would never find him—the snow would hide his body in no time. And he must get down or soon fall, frozen stiff.

He slid his free foot about the wall; there was a slight indentation just below. He must chance it. Gingerly, he shifted his weight. Ice crumbled beneath his foot. He drew back. He heard a crackling below and looked down as the sound grew into a deep rumble. A great chunk of ice had been dislodged just below him. It thundered down into the valley and the vast walls of the surrounding glacier answered in clangorous echoes, hurled them back and forth till the valley was filled with deafening voices.

Rod stared, transfixed with the sound. He did not hear the siren scream from above as tons of ice smashed down upon him.

It fell into the chasm, roared in a sparkling explosion. . . .

**H**IS first thought was that there was something which he must do. The concrete idea lurked far back in the hazy shadows of forgetfulness and, grope as he might, he could not bring the notion into full comprehension; it was but a vague, unformed feeling. Next came the realization of a faint humming in his ears. It whispered in a monotonous drone and he listened to it for some time. Then consciousness slowly dawned upon his lazy mind. He remembered the deep echoes in the valley of ice, something sweeping him away to sudden blackness. . . .

He looked about him, dazed. He did not know what he expected to find, but this certainly was not it.

He was in a small, square room, white walled and windowless. A closed door was at one side and the walls, of a peculiar metallic substance, were not walls but little cabinets, many square doors with knobs. In a corner was a large dynamo-like machine—from here came the humming sound—and beside it was an unfamiliar apparatus of innumerable tubes, coils and levers. The room was lighted by a phos-

phorescent glow that covered the entire ceiling, a sheen of soft whiteness.

And he felt so strange . . . a peculiar feeling of detachment, a dead non-feeling; like the first awakening moments from a sleep of hazy dreams, as if he were still in that half-world of mysterious insensibility, his mind awake but his body and all its physical consciousness yet unaroused from the deep, lethargic coma of abeyance. Rod felt no awareness of his body; only his mind seemed alive. As though he were entirely apart from all commonplace sensations of embodiment, his brain utterly cut off from all external senses, he possessed no feeling of concrete existence and from the room about him there emanated no semblance of reality. It stood distant from him and he felt nothing, merely saw with numb objectivity that it was there. . . .

He raised a hand to his face—he thought the movement with no deliberation of will but the thought burst upon him with frantic helplessness when there was no response. His hand did not raise. As in a stupor, his whole body paralyzed and free of his will, he could not move.

Rod glanced down at his body. *There was no body!*

He sank sickeningly within himself and a wave of cold fear swept over him. A barrel-like thing of metal covered his body. And falling to new depths of swift panic, he saw that the container was much too small to hold the six feet, four inches of him. . . .

He struggled to move about in the barrel. He was stuck there tightly; he could not budge. Examining the thing, he saw it was a smooth, seamless cylinder about three feet high. It was shiny black in color and mid-way on opposite sides were circular openings covered with a screen of microscopic gauze.

But how could he see outside if he were *in it*? It was as though he were standing above the object, looking down upon it from a cycloidal distance.

From the center of the cylinder's flat top, attached to a sort of socket, projected a snaky, black cable. It ran upward, and following its spindling curve, Rod was astonished to observe that he could not see its other end. He craned his neck upward—the cable moved. It was alive!

He recoiled in unreasoning fright. The wiry thing followed. He shook his head wildly. And the cable persisted in an imitation of his movements. He ducked his head down beside the barrel and the black strand—as much of it as was visible—came after him.

His brain was hot with insane fear. He dashed madly about his limited sphere of movement. His mind whirled and an unrequited nausea darkened his consciousness.

Rod fainted.

WHEN he came to, he saw a black machine before him. It was cylindrical, set upon two metal-encased wheels. From sockets in the upper edge of the cylinder, on opposite sides, hung a pair of triple-jointed, arm-like bars at the ends of which dangled strands of thick, black wire. Upon the front of the machine was a little contact lever and large, raised numerals of glossy white—83. There were two small, mesh openings on the sides and set in the center of the top was a socket from which reared a long, slender cable, seemingly rigid, for at its end was a thin, metal-encircled, glassy disk. And deep within its prismatic refractions, Rod noticed a dark core—an eye, staring at him.

He gazed at the thing with irresistible fascination. There was life there, unholy, irrationally terrifying. He tried to back away and could not move.

He remembered he was imprisoned in the barrel and he glanced down at the cylinder covering him. It was like the machine's.

And suddenly he realized he was not in the cylinder. He *was* the cylinder. . . .

His mind froze to no thought.

The machine rolled silently forward, the eye fixed upon him.

"How do you feel?" It spoke, the sound like a cheap phonograph and with an insane tone in the words.

Rod was dumb. He merely stared.

"What—!" he finally quavered. But his voice was only a shrill whistle. The machine moved closer and the arm-like metal rods shot out, adjusted a small dial upon his drum. And he could speak. . . .

"What are you!" cried Rod. His voice was like the machine's.

"I am 83, Capek," said the thing. "But you do not comprehend. I have a brain,

set within my shell as I fixed yours."

"You did this?" Rod's mind lunged hotly at the machine, but he could not move. He stayed where he was, helpless.

"Yes, I did it. I took your brain from the frozen body before it could deteriorate, placed it in this more substantial form.

"Where am I?" demanded Rod.

"These are my compartments, in the shop of Detroy. I found you encased in an iceberg, floating in the sea. By your dress you must have been there, perfectly preserved, for well over five thousand years—this is 6984. The last of your form, except those we use, were destroyed during the reign of A3, in the Great Conquest of the 40th century A.D. Your body was badly broken but the brain, fortunately, remained intact. I needed you, smuggled materials here and set your brain in a shell."

Lord, Rod thought. Prisoned in this thing forever! The shock of understanding was like a blow. He only wanted to die. . . .

"**W**HY am I needed?" Rod asked listlessly.

"I discovered by chance a counteraction for R4's *idea*. We are ruled by this, you see. There are only a hundred of us Cappeks, all living here. Our science making others unnecessary, we limited ourselves to that number after conquering the world. This is the reign of R4. Each ruler governs the others by his *idea*—obedience to him instilled in each new brain by the royal vibration-ray. With my counteractive mechanism, I was able to liberate myself from his control, and my mind now free to individual thought, I shall usurp the throne. I could not trust the others. You arrived most opportunely. I shall give you *my idea* and you shall aid me!"

Rod stared about the room helplessly. He was a pawn to this creature, body and mind. He was but a consciousness that had no will.

The machine called 83 glided to a cabinet upon the wall, returned with two long, jointed bars and a little wheeled carriage like his own. He put the burden on the floor beside Rod's cylinder and commenced to work, metal arms and tendril hands flying skilfully as he assembled the disjointed parts.

"I shall fit your arms and rollers, then give you the conditioning-accellerator for my idea," said 83.

Rod watched the progress, his mind far away. Five thousand years. . . . It could not be—but it was! It was true; the metal body, these arms of metal which were being prepared for him, this feeling of disembodiment—it was no dream—he was no longer a man, a human being; he was a thing of inorganization, a robot of no feeling, no sensation. He was nothing but a severed brain, without even the power to die. . . .

"Can you never die?" he impassively voiced his thoughts.

"Yes, in a way perhaps. Our span, even with a perfected metabolic system, but little more than doubles normal mortality; depending upon the quality of the particular brain. But then we simply change to another. We remain the same. Only the ruler's number changes with the new brain."

"How does the brain live?"

"By a simple counterpart of its original requirements and a delicate system of connectives with which it controls the body. Naturally, under these perfect conditions it would be immortal did not the perfection also produce physical growth. It must be changed when the size increases to such an extent that pressure upon the cup impairs its utility."

"Do you construct the brains also?"

"Oh, no. We breed them. There is apparently no other method; but the supply is plentiful. They are bred constantly in the stock yards."

Rod was horrified at his coldness. But what warmth of the human soul could long dwell in such a malanthropy of glass and steel? Then a faint spark came to sudden life within him.

"You keep live human beings here, breed them?"

"**C**ERTAINLY. We keep several hundred of the live stock ready at all times."

"Where are they kept?"

"In compartments at the north end of the shop. They are raised under perfect conditions and regularly thinned out."

There were humans here! Rod burned with the thought. He must get to them!

There was something to live for now. . . . But how could he escape? He was completely at 83's command; soon, even his mind would be at the monster's disposal.

The parts were assembled and 83 easily lifted Rod's shell. He stared at it intently.

"It is a fine piece of work!" he exclaimed, admiringly. "It is as no other here. We are forced to leave our suspension switches exposed that we may be conveniently cut off at R4's desire. It disconnects impulse and response." Rod noticed the lever upon 83's drum. "But I made your shell in secret. You have no such switch; there is no way you may be stopped unless dismembered, as you are now. Also your activators are far stronger than the Capek's; your strength is greater. And I have tempered your shell to even heat-ray resistance."

The wheeled carriage was fitted to his underside and Rod was lowered to the floor. The machine screwed one arm in its socket—it was a simple matter—and picked up the other. He looked at it, turned it about in his tendrils.

"Zutkuh!" he cried. "I've gotten two left upper-joints by mistake. This will not fit the right socket. I must go get another from the supply house." He whirled, rolled toward the door. Then paused, returned. "But you can be absorbing the *idea* while I am gone! It will save time."

He went to the peculiar machine Rod had noticed in the corner, rolled it to him.

It was a wheeled, oblong box, thickly insulated and studded with calibrated dials and levers. A heavy cord connected it with the dynamo. Taking a length of wire, 83 attached one end to a contact on the machine, approached Rod with the other.

"This is a short-wave vibration transmitter which is attuned to my cerebral frequency. I shall attach it to your braincord and when I return your mind will be on the exact wave-length as mine. Our every thought will be synonymous, with the exception that the weaker potential which I give you will place you in my command.

Rod watched 83 and to his mind came a wild, formless plan.

The machine rolled close and 83 elongated his neck cable, eyed a small hole in Rod's cylinder. He reached to plug in the wire.

Rod's single arm moved quickly, silently. Before 83 could perceive the motion, Rod had entwined his steel tendrils about the lever on his shell, snapped the switch downward.

The black neck of 83 went suddenly limp. His crystal eye mechanism dulled, clattered to the floor and the jointed arms fell, dangled lifelessly.

Rod marveled at the ease with which he moved. Given the thought stimulus, his members sprang into action with amazing speed and strength. He fumbled with 83's right upper-arm joint, unscrewed it from the socket, and with a dexterity he had never known, set it in place upon himself. It responded instantly as contact was made with the sensitive mechanism within.

Rod rolled to the door, gliding smoothly upon his wheels.

HE halted at the scene outside.

Stretching into a misty distance, the city of Detroy was a flat plane of concrete-like earth, broken by rows of long, low buildings and a great tower, windows at the summit, which soared high above the vast expanse. He glanced about and saw everywhere the same monotonous panorama—oblong, single-story compartments like the one he had left, glaring whitely metallic in the noon-day sun. The high structure, the sole dominating object, towered above everything else. Lazy clouds wandered over in a sky of summer blue.

The streets swarmed with many machines, all constructed like himself, entering and leaving the buildings, rolling purposefully about everywhere, like little cars. There were numbers upon their shells, none exceeding one hundred. Nervously he watched several approach, but they passed, paid him no attention.

There was no sound but the soft whine of resilient wheels upon the street, an occasional murmur of unintelligible, passing conversation.

But he must find the humans! Where were the stock yards? To ask might arouse suspicion. He would have to chance being taken for one of the others, though he had no number. He rolled aimlessly down the street.

As he passed one building—all of them were alike—he heard the vibrant hum of a great machinery and peering in the open

door, he saw a gigantic room filled with dynamos and electrical apparatus of a simplified, advanced design. It must be a sort of power plant, he thought as he moved on.

There was scarcely any fraternizing, Rod observed. The Capeks kept mostly to themselves; carefully avoided collision and there was no salutations in passing. They truly were things without feeling. Doubtless, only the governing idea, of which 83 had spoken, forced their concerted interest in a common society. Unheeded, he advanced up the crowded thoroughfare.

Two machines approached carrying a long, metal box. It was open at the top and Rod glanced into the container as they passed. With revulsion he saw that it held the trephined body of a man, newly dead, fresh blood upon the smoothly severed crown of the skull. The top of the shaved head also lay in the box. And weak with new waves of nausea, he saw that the brain had been cleanly removed. The rest of the nude body was intact.

The machines carrying the grizzly burden passed on.

A human corpse, freshly dead! The repugnance of the sight was swept away by a sudden flash of logic. They must have come from the stock yards. . . .

Rod looked cautiously about—there was no suspicious glance at him—slowly, with a pretense of just remembering something, he turned and followed.

The Capeks carried the ghastly box a short way down the street, halted before a small building. A sliding door opened at a touch and the container was shoved in, to disappear down a winding shoot. The door closed and they returned the way they had come.

Rod followed slightly behind them, unnoticed. The shoot must have led to a kind of incinerator, but he feared to think what ghoulish eccentricities these soulless creatures might have developed.

The machines rolled along swiftly for several minutes. Then they suddenly turned into a side street, entered a building. Rod remained in the street, undecided. While he watched, several Capeks passed him, entered also. Finally he wheeled to the door and went in. What had he to lose?

Inside was a long, deserted corridor

with many closed doors along the walls. The far end of the hall was open to the sunlight and he rolled there, looked out.

Before him was an immense, square compound, surrounded by high walls and partitioned into many sections. And in the enclosures moved throngs of *human beings*. Rod stood and stared.

The faces of the men and women there possessed no look of the caged animal—they milled about like cattle, talking and laughing among themselves. The centuries of captivity had changed men little for their stature and appearance was as he had known them. He could feel nothing but it must be warm, for they were lightly clad. Along the partitions were rows of many compartments, probably living quarters. In one large section were many women, some holding small children.

Then he noticed that in the geometric divisions of the fenced places was a purpose of separation. One contained larger children, happily playing timeless games; another was crowded with older youths, girls separated from the boys. In a more spacious enclosure, neatly encircled by compact quarters, were the adults. Some stood about in groups, conversing pleasantly; others walked the edges of the fences, men and women in pairs; more sat before their houses, some entering and leaving. It was as in the crowded settlements of a large city. These people lived here, carried on a life, perhaps more leisurely, but little different than in the general environment from which he had come.

Rod saw the adult area was open to smaller enclosures. He noticed a neatly landscaped park, flowered and with green trees, grassy paths. There were even brilliantly-hued birds. Men and women sat upon the turf and upon benches along the little trails. In another partition was an assortment of gymnastic equipment and Rod visualized these human beings led like animals out to regular exercise for their health.

Here was real life—flesh, human faces, bodies as he had possessed! And all penned here, like sheep awaiting the butcher.

So engrossed was he in his thoughts that he was startled to notice two Capeks coming down the long, wire-barracaded path which bisected the compound. They were preceded by two men and a woman.

AS they neared, Rod forgot his caution, watched their approach. One of the men was huge and swarthy, his bushy hair black and his features heavy. His forehead, however, was high, and his face, despite the prominent nose and large eyes, was of a delicate gentleness; a man of strength, and mind. The other was tall and slender, well proportioned and broad of shoulder. His features were finely cut and his blond hair was thick and well groomed. He carried himself rigidly erect and with an air of suppressed feeling. His firm chin he held high and his eyes stared straight ahead, apparently at something far beyond. He was speaking softly to the woman, one muscular arm around her waist. The woman—she was more a girl—was almost as tall as the man. Her hips were narrow and her shoulders wide, but the fullness of her breast and her rhythmic, animal grace proclaimed her richly feminine. There was a clear beauty in her brown hair, the swift symmetry of her patrician nose, the ripe lips and in the sparkling blue of her eyes. All wore identical clothing, a loose suit of thin cloth; sandals upon their feet.

They passed Rod without a glance. But as they passed the woman spoke.

"It has been worth it—" Rod heard her say and they marched in the building and down the corridor.

The Capeks followed them and Rod turned to watch their departure. But as they were half-way down the deserted hall, one machine made a restraining movement and they halted. A door opened and they passed from view into a side room.

Rod stared at the vacant hall for a long moment, felt a strange sense of unease. Where were they going? Why were they led out, the others left behind? What had the woman meant by "It has been—" Suddenly his mind snapped with a hazard supposition. The brainless corpse he had seen! The Capeks bred *brains!* They used them as needed; so had said 83. . . .

He dashed down the hall. There was no plan in his mind but action. He paused before the door, then pushed in.

It was a wide chamber with no windows. The door was the only exit. Lighted by the same ceiling glow as all these rooms seemed to be, this light was more intense. Everything was spotless. And stark in the

glare was a raised platform upon which rested five oblong tables. Upon the tables lay the men and the woman.

Three Capeks stood near, two others—by their numbers those he had followed—stood by in the center of the room.

The humans were strapped to the tables, a Capek stood over each of them. Rod noticed the walls were lined with shelves of glittering instruments. There was a stronger light over the platform.

It was an operating room! His premonitions had been correct—these people were to be de-brained, at once.

One Capek raised a thin lancet and his eye bent over the form of the dark-haired man. The others were arranging implements along the sides of the tables.

Rod had not been noticed. Unresisted admission seemed customary at any place here.

The voice of the blond man spoke softly but it was clearly audible in the quiet room.

"Good-bye, Vee," he said.

"Stop!" cried Rod. He shot to the platform, knocked the lancet from the hand of the nearest machine.

The Capeks turned in obvious astonishment.

"What is the meaning of this!" demanded one. Then his voice changed to incredulity. "You have no number—"

The next step was unconsidered. He had been finally found out. And he could not let these people die. It did not matter what happened to him.

He reached out, snapped the suspension switch upon the shell of the Capek who had spoken. The machine drooped instantly.

Another clutched his arm and Rod whirled upon him. His strength was as yet untested and he wondered how powerful he really was. He snapped his arm from the grasp, flicked down and caught the machine by its carriage. Easily lifting the wriggling Capek over his head, he flung the thing through the air. It crashed into the far wall with an explosion of shattered machinery.

Another rushed at him, arms rearing. Rod caught one of the metal bars and tore it from its socket. With his other hand he grasped the neck cable of a near Capek, pulled out its single eye. He was rapidly learning to fight with his new powers and

he tore into the rest with a clash of steel against steel.

The machine with the severed neck was flailing the air blindly. Rod grabbed another and hurled it into the eyeless one. The last machine raised a broken leg-bar and swung it at Rod's eye. He dodged and the metal struck his right arm, splintered it. The tendrils dangled, useless. Rod caught the Capek with his other, whipped it into the wall.

Broken parts littered the floor, reddish fluid seeping from crushed shells. He turned to see the one-armed machine fleeing from the room, out the door before he could pursue. He would warn the others. And he had but one arm now. . . .

ROD turned to the men and the woman upon the slabs. Their eyes were wide. He felt a choking sorrow as he looked at them, helpless there, and he thought of the others outside in the compound, equally as helpless and doomed to a fate such as he had saved these. But had he saved them? The room would be filled with avenging Capeks in a moment.

Hurriedly, he loosened the straps which bound them.

"We must go quickly; he will bring others!" he said.

They sat up, still staring.

"What are you?" asked the blond one.

"I am Rod Carver. I come from that age of freedom which your ancestors cherished." He saw them look to his machine body and back to his eye, unbelieving. He struck his shell with a tendril. "One of them did this to me—put my brain here. I escaped before the *idea* was given."

They said nothing and the girl moved to the light-haired man, put an arm upon his shoulder. The stocky one stared at Rod with poignant eyes; his arms hung limply with the quiet reserve of strength.

"I understand there are but a hundred of them. I shall release all of you. We can do something!" cried Rod.

"How did you get here?" asked the tall one.

"There is no time—can't you see! I will explain later. We must leave *now!*"

"What have we to lose, Ralph?" said the dark-haired one, turning to his companion. He looked back to Rod, jumped down to the platform. "I don't know why or what

you are, but I saw what you just did." He motioned to the woman and the man. "This is Vee, and Ralph. I am Daro. We will go with you to whatever comes."

"Shall I release the others?" asked Rod.

"You can't. They're enclosed by electrically charged wire," put in the one named Ralph.

There was a sudden whirr of machinery in the corridor outside, the chatter of many voices.

"They come!" cried Daro.

Rod rushed to the door.

"Keep behind me!" he commanded.

He pulled the door open. One end of the hall was packed with machines coming from the compound. The Capek that had escaped must have gone there for help. The opening to the street was deserted except for those passing.

"This way!" Rod yelled and dashed for the street. The others followed with the mob of Capeks speeding swiftly after them.

For a moment the scene was as he had first observed it, quiet with moving machines in the afternoon sun. Then, as they burst out of the building, there was an abrupt cessation of activity. All stopped, craned their black neck cords and stared.

"Come on!" Rod yelled to his human allies and sped up the street, not knowing where.

BUT the surprise of the Capeks was brief. As the swarm poured from the building, all in the streets joined them in mad pursuit.

Rod turned down a deserted side street, then up another. For the time being, they were lost from view.

Finally, seeing the humans wearily fall behind, he halted.

"How do we leave the city?" he asked.

"We cannot leave Detrov. We would surely die outside," panted Ralph. "The Capeks destroyed all life and vegetation when they conquered our ancestors; it is a blistering desert everywhere."

Suddenly a horde of machines rolled out of an alley in front of them, cutting off their retreat. Red looked about frantically. There was an open door in a building across the way. He motioned toward it. They ran over. When they were inside, he slammed the door.

He saw to the locks as the mob halted



outside, shouting. It was a small, bare chamber, opening into another room at the rear. He looked in; there was no other exit. Except that there were no cabinets, the room was similar to the quarters of 83, where he had first been.

In this brief respite, he found them staring at him again.

"How did you get here?" asked Daro.

And briefly, his words loud above the noise outside, he told them what he knew of his coming and the subsequent happenings.

They listened with sparkling eyes, unmindful of their present insecurity.

"Why, it's like nothing that ever happened," cried the girl when he had finished. And Rod's mind was kindled with a single purpose. He had no idea what he could do—perhaps it was too late now—but he was willing to give his life in an attempt to set these people free. His life was nothing, meaningless to him as he was. . . .

"But I guess we're trapped," he said. "With one of my arms gone, we could never get through that crowd outside."

Something was ranning against the door. It shook under the blows and Rod rolled over, putting his weight against it. Ralph had found a thick, metal bar in the room. The massive Daro had procured a hatchet of sorts. The girl stood against the wall, keeping out of the way.

The pounding upon the door grew stronger. Finally, with a crash it burst in, flinging Rod across the room. Two Capeks scrambled from the floor where they had fallen.

Daro swung his hatchet into a shell and as it spurted red, Ralph did away with the other one. Rod leaped up.

Machines were streaming into the room. Rod pulled the eye from the nearest, snatched at another and flung him at the mob in the door. He was fast learning how to steer his powerful body. He thought "speed," and darted into the machines with all the force of his weight. A wave fell, piled at the doorway, barrels smashed. But they were immediately pushed aside as others came.

Rod rolled into the helpless fight but, with his single arm, was of little aid. Ralph and Daro swung right and left. But it was a losing battle from the beginning—

those fallen were immediately replaced.

Finally Daro dropped his hatchet and, at the risk of his life, knelt over a fallen Capek. He unscrewed the right arm, then fough his way to Rod's side. Rod saw his intention and held off the machines with his left as Daro removed his shattered limb, fitted the new arm in the socket. He had almost finished when a tendril caught him by a leg. He was swung high into the air, snapped like a whip. The Capek bashed his somber head against the shell of another machine. Daro died instantly.

Rod's brain, the only human element he possessed, melted with hot compassion at the courageous sacrifice, then flamed to blind fury. Like a thing possessed, he screwed the arm home and wheeled into the fray, pounding gigantic blows with balled tendrils. In a moment beneath his onslaught there was not a machine standing in the room.

He looked to the door, saw two Capeks jammed there, unable to move. The narrow entrance was blocked. Behind them a horde of machines pressed vainly. Then they drew back, gathered in little groups, shouting and waving their arms. Rod snapped the switches of those stuck in the doorway.

"R4, the ruler, has not arrived yet," said Ralph. "Without him, their brains can conceive of no concerted action."

"And when he comes?" asked Rod.

The tall man mutely pointed to the broken body of Daro upon the floor.

**W**HEN he comes, R4 will doubtless call for his flame guns and dispense with the matter at once," Ralph said with resignation. "It was by those weapons that civilization was overthrown—rays of invisible heat that withered all it touched. However, since the beginning of their indubitable security here, they retain only a few of these guns which they must connect to the main power transmitter. I saw it happen once when I was a boy, during a brief rebellion."

Suddenly Rod remembered the power building which he had seen on the way to the compound. The rays were operated by the same power that ran the city. He remembered 83 saying he was impervious to heat. If he could reach the power plant, destroy it, then the Capeks would be weap-

unless. And with the greater strength that 83 had bestowed—he had two arms now and he had learned much—they might have a chance against the machines. There were but a hundred of them. How many had been accounted for already? But how could he leave with them swarming at the only exit? And they would get the humans if he left. He whispered to Ralph of his scheme. It might be that he could do something in time. . . .

"If you got through," Ralph said, "I think I could hold the door. It will take time for them to unjam the machines there. It's our only chance. Go!"

Then Rod thought of the rear chamber. It might be suicide, but he must try.

"Do what you can until I return," he said. "You can always surrender; they would probably not harm you if you gave up."

"We prefer to die here," said Ralph. Vee came to his side. She held the hatchet Daro had dropped.

Rod rolled into the other room. He went to the wall, tapped it, inspected it closely. It was of metal but did not sound very thick. He backed up, arms and neck cord behind him out of the way. He hurled himself against the wall.

It smashed before him and he careened into the street behind the building. There was no machine in sight.

Rod darted down the pavement, turned into the next street. Far in the distance, he could see the crowd before the building he had left.

He shot across the thoroughfare and into the next, glided swiftly to the power plant.

He paused at the door, heard again the drone of massive dynamos.

There came a cry from within and several Capeks rushed out, the afternoon sunlight glittering upon their number plates. Rod hurled one heavily to the pavement, eluded the others and darted into the building.

It was a monstrous room, walls studded with glowing tubes, machinery covering the floor. The Capeks—there were six of them—came at him again but he dodged. He began smashing every tube in sight. He sped along the wall, one arm rigidly outstretched, breaking tubes as he passed. Holding the Capeks off with his other hand, he encircled the room, shattered every

tube. But the light of the ceiling continued to glow. The power was unimpaired.

Finally he was forced to turn upon his tormentors. Two fell at the first blow of his metal fist. One fled across the room and pushed a large lever on the wall, as Rod killed the others. A narrow door opened at the end of the room and Capeks, a steady stream of them, began rolling out. The one who had opened the door shouted a command as Rod smashed him.

The machines drew near, then rushed in a body. Rod retreated, wheeled about the room, a mad thing of metal, breaking everything in his path. Where was the main mechanism? His efforts had been useless, the light upon the ceiling still glowed, the whine of power continued. The controlling unit must be elsewhere.

Suddenly he found himself in a corner, surrounded, others still entering the door. They were a wall of steel before him.

**T**HE first wave approached and he fought them off. But slowly, by their strength of numbers, he was forced to the floor, his wheels knocked from under him, tendrils covering his arms.

They lifted him, marched to the center of the room. He was caught. He had failed! Mankind would continue in their power, they would be bred like sheep forever; mere brains to these mind-vampires. He had been their only hope. . . .

The Capeks were apparently waiting for orders, holding him there in the middle of the room. He was held tightly by a dozen of them; the others returned to the compartment and the door closed. Rod tried commanding them to release him, to no avail. They remained silent and seemingly with little interest but to hold him there. They were probably mere workers, he thought, with practically no independent impulses.

Glancing helplessly about the room, Rod noticed a glowing metal disk near his ring of captors. It was but a few feet from him, gleaming with a dull, reddish light; a glass tube encased in wire mesh. He had overlooked it before. Looking about, he saw it to be the only unshattered instrument in the room. It might be the main tube!

Rod grew limp in their tendrils for a moment. Then suddenly he lunged backward, away from the tube with all his

strength. It had the desired effect. The Capeks tugged at him. He went limp again. At the sudden cessation of his pull, the machines fell backward and he was forced forward upon their sprawled bodies.

Swiftly he elongated his neck. He raised it high, lashed down at the tube with his eye. Rod saw the mesh cave in and the glass shatter. Then his eye burst and all was black. He was jerked to his feet again, and despite the rattle of his captors' machinery, he felt a strange silence. The dynamos had halted. The power was off!

Then the tendrils of the Capeks fell away from his arms. He heard the clatter of cylinders falling to the floor. He could see nothing. But something in his inner consciousness told him to flee; some deep intuition older than thought, born of a time when the desert beyond the city was lush vegetation and furry animals roamed its dawn trails, an ancient wisdom cried of danger in the darkness.

He remembered he had been facing the door. Arms outstretched, he moved forward, hit the wall, groped about and finally found the opening.

He moved outside into the street. He remembered which way to go, but blind he could never find the building in which he had left the humans. He could be of little assistance now if he did. And he had lost so much time.

Rod rolled slowly, his mind devoid of a solution. He would be an easy prey to the first Capek that chanced upon him. The wheels of his carriage hit something. Before he could stop, he fell over the obstacle, crashed to the pavement.

He lay there prepared for anything and expecting immediate death. But there was no sound. Carefully, he felt about him, discovered the thing over which he had fallen. By its shape, he made out the form of a dead Capek—the one he had killed on the way in.

Whispering a prayer to whatever god still lingered in this unsanctioned age, he felt for the neck cable, would have made burnt offerings when he found the dead eye unbroken. He detached it and, removing his own, set it there—could see again.

He glanced to the power plant. It was now a mass of twisted, steaming metal. The whole building had melted silently to

the ground and in the rising waves of heat, he could see the glowing shells of cremated Capeks, those that had captured him. Looking to his own cylinder, Rod saw it was blistered with heat, one arm was badly bent. The destruction of the dynamos had released tremendous stored energy, had consumed the whole building as it dissipated into the air.

As Rod hurried up the street, his mind was filled with a three-fold thankfulness; to a sixth sense that even his soulless reincarnation could not disavow, to the Capek 83 who, with whatever motive, had given him a body with such resistance, and to a merciful guiding spirit that sent in his path the accident of regained sight.

Swiftly he shot up the street. The sun was low in the west and the alleys were darkening. But he made no attempt at concealment now. The Capeks were nothing to the fate he had survived. Thanks again to 83, he would have a fair chance against them unless greatly outnumbered.

As Rod neared the squat building where he had left Ralph and the woman, he saw no movement. Before the door was a great heap of machinery, the street was filled with scattered parts. The street was deserted. The Capeks were gone. All was silent.

ON each side of the door, which was still jammed with suspended machines, were smooth holes. Rod peered in. The unmoving body of Ralph, his clothing in tatters, lay upon the floor amid a mass of broken metal. His face was bloody. The girl was not there.

Rod entered, placed his tendrils beneath the body, raised it. As he did so, the man moaned, slowly opened his eyes. He stared at Rod blankly. Then he recoiled and his eyes filled with fright.

Rod held him gently but firmly.

"It is I, Rod Carver! What happened? Where is Vee?"

Ralph sighed with relief, tried to sit up.

"R4 came soon after you left," he whispered hoarsely. "They entered with the flame gun. I fought but they beat me down, without using the weapon. R4 came in. I struggled up, hit him with the hatchet. I killed him." He laughed hysterically. "A Capek hit me and they thought I was dead." Suddenly he started and writhed,

attempting to rise. A leg was broken. "Vee!" he cried. "They took Vee! They went to the tower to create another ruler immediately—to use her brain!"

Rod swung the man to the flat top of his shell, leapt out into the street. The tower, rising miles above the city, was close by. He rolled there with all the speed of his wheels, was at the door almost instantly.

The edifice was octagonal of shape and windowless except high in its corniced loft; a single door at its base. Rod entered the great door. The chamber within, vaulted with distorted curves and planes, decorated with unknown instruments, was vacant. The room was lighted. The tower must have a small separate power unit. . . .

Faintly, he heard sounds from above, noticed a winding slide that spiraled to the upper floors. He rolled upon the little incline and shot upward, dizzily around and around, following the increasing sounds coming down the shaft. He reached the top floor, halted at the landing.

The sounds were voices, chanting, an insane metallic chatter. Rod rolled silently down a wide, smooth corridor. The voices came from behind a massive door at the end of the hall.

Ralph still upon his shell, Rod flung the door open. The chant died away. It was an immense chamber, wark windows upon the far wall, lights hanging from the high ceiling. Around the walls stood the Capeks, all eyes upon him. In the center of the room, Rod saw a long dais, shimmering of a yellow metal, and upon it, swathed in white cloth, was the bound body of Vee. Beside here were two Capeks, the numbers 2 and 3 upon their shells. Holding a platter of glistening instruments, one stood at the side. With a lancet poised in his hand, the other stood over the girl.

"Stop!" cried Rod.

He dropped Ralph to the floor, advanced. The Capeks remained motionless, staring. Number 2 watched his approach, hand in the air over Vee's head.

Rod thought, "speed. Great speed!" In a flash, he was there, caught the arm with the knife, jerked it from its socket.

The machines made quick recovery from their surprise. There remained perhaps sixty of them after the day of destruction; they swept toward him in a murderous wave. Madly, they rushed upon him from

all sides and he was knocked from his carriage, covered by falling cylinders. He fought with a deadly power but was at last lifted bodily from the floor. His arms were strapped to his sides. He was rolled into a corner. The ceremony continued without another glance at him.

Across the room, Ralph was bound in a like manner, head sagging upon his chest. They had lost! It was all over now. . . .

A Capek again stood over the body of Vee, the lancet in his hand. The machines were lined against the walls as before.

"A RULER is born!" shouted the Capek flourishing the knife. "From this despised clay arises a super-being—R-five!" He leveled the lancet at the side of Vee's head, to plunge it into the scalp; to uncover the brain.

Rod struggled at his bonds with all his mechanical strength. He could not move. His wheels were also locked, strapped to the wall. He must stand here and watch her die—a deathless death—to be reincarnated as the foul brain of a cruel thing of metal. There was nothing he could do!

Rod watched the unwavering knife move close. Horror fused his mind.

Suddenly the knife paused. There was a clamoring of many voices in the hall outside—human voices! The machines' eyes all turned to the door. Rod looked, saw men and women pouring into the room.

They came in droves, waving metal spikes and bars, slashing into the dumbstruck Capeks. The tide swelled, engulfed the room. Rod saw the Capeks with the lancet raised into the air, flung screaming through the window.

Finally—it was but a moment—the shouts were silenced and not a Capek stood in the room. They were hulks of reddening machinery scattered about the floor.

Two men released Vee and, swirling the cloth about her trim figure, she rushed to Ralph who revived in her arms. Then everyone talked at once and Rod, thrilling with exultance, heard in snatches that they had climbed the fences when they discovered the electrical charge was cut off—when the power plant was destroyed. They had left the stock yards and come here.

Vee supporting him, Ralph came and cut Rod's bonds. His besmeared face was a radiation of complete happiness and he

gave not a glance to his injured leg.

"We owe it all to you," he said softly, then turned to the staring crowd. "Here is our true saviour! He shall be our ruler forever!"

"Yes?" disputed a vibrant voice at the door. All heads turned.

A Capek stood there, eye blazing. Upon his chest was the number *eighty-three*.

"**S**TAND back!" he shouted. "My strength is not as these weaklings you have conquered! Stand back or die!" He advanced into the room. Several men leaped upon him but he swept them down with a wave of his arm. He came to Rod, eye stretched close.

"I have much to thank you for, my creation!" he said. "You have saved me considerable trouble. Did you think it your mind that set these miserable humans free? Fool! I gave you my *idea* long before you regained consciousness in my compartments. And your every action was the result of my initial impulse, even your pulling the false suspension switch upon my shell. I instilled it in your mind to kill every Capek if you could!"

The crowds had drawn away, shrunk back from the two machines. Ralph and Vee stood at the edge of the crowd, transfixed.

"Now I am ruler," shouted 83. "That was my original purpose, you remember." He raised one hand dramatically. "I command you to take these slugs back to the stock yards!"

Rod's mind whirled. *Was* he in this monster's power? Had he no original thoughts? Was it thus that he had survived the destruction of the power plant? Something within him told him to obey; but the hatred of the machine, the Capek before him, was greater than the urge to obedience. He might be at his bidding but 83 had overlooked one thing. . . .

"Whether it is your idea or mine, I do not know," said Rod, "but I shall kill you—for you, too, are a Capek!" He rolled slowly forward.

"Stop!" 83 faltered. "See this body, mind. It is as strong as yours. I made both. What I created, I can destroy!"

Rod said nothing. He shot out an arm and grasped the long neck.

With a snap of the cable, 83 tore loose from his tendrils. He was more powerful than the others had been.

Arms flailing, seeking a death-hold upon the darting machine, Rod caught a wheel of 83's carriage, up-ended him. But the thing was on its wheels instantly, upon him again. Rod found a grip upon one black arm, hurled him against the floor. The crash which would have ruined another Capek affected 83 not at all. He charged again. Rod was taken by the neck, flung against the wall. A roller was broken.

Rod careened about the room, sparring for an opening. Twice men interfered, to be instantly killed by a stroke of 83's hand.

Catching a firm hold upon the other's arms at the upper joint, close to the shell, they remained deadlocked for a moment, staring into each other's eye.

Rod twisted with all his might. Then 83's arms snapped—and so did his.

Both dismembered, they paused.

And 83 whirled, fleeing from the room.

**R**OD was after him instantly, passed him at the landing, blocked his escape downward. Turning, 83 dashed up the slide to the roof. Rod followed. The Capek, dashing madly about the level, was finally trapped in a corner of the light railing.

Rod gazed at him in the dimming light, advanced slowly. A great sadness filled his mind as he came on, the city of Detrov lying silent in the shadows far below; a great sadness and a great joy. Sadness for himself, trapped forever in this half-tomb of metal; joy at the restoration of the human race. They, the people below, would eternally worship him for their salvation. But he could never be one of them, never again thrill to the little things which are essentially human. He would ever be a lonely brain, encased in cold, impassive steel. He could see the sunset and the soft dusk over the city, hear the whispers of night; but never could he feel them. . . .

He looked to the cringing shape of 83 and, had he been capable, would have smiled, as he thought, "Speed!"

He rushed at 83, thundering into the scheming Capek. The railing snapped and they went over the edge, and down into the depth below.

# THE SPACE FLAME

By ALEXANDER M. PHILLIPS

A rocketless hulk spinning helplessly through uncharted heavens. . . .  
A derelict space-ship. But within that Eternity-bound shell was even  
greater peril. Fire—living, writhing, horrible! Flame that hissed and  
coiled and struck with jeweled tongues of Death.

CARGYLE wiped away the blood from a flesh wound over one eye. The body of a mutineer lay half across the threshold of the small cabin. They'd gotten that close to him. They were out there in the corridors, the mutineers, searching out the officers . . . killing them.

Far off in the rocket ship a burst of firing broke out. A chorus of wild yelling began, muted by distance and the intervening walls. Cargyle listened intently; perhaps a stand was being made against the crew! The sounds seemed to come from the control room. He hesitated, staring through the heavy port in the hull at the still stars in the blackness beyond. If there were officers still defending the pilot room, his place was with them. But if the mutineers were in possession, he'd be going to his death. With a shrug, he pressed a concealed button set in the wall. A panel of the inner wall of the hull slid quietly open. Tucking his blastor pistol into his belt, Cargyle crawled into the space revealed.

All space cruisers were equipped with passages like this, known only to the officers: in the long monotonous months in space tension between men would sometimes sweep up to murderous frenzy, and mutinies were not uncommon.

Mutiny on the *Denebola* had been long coming. They were returning from a three-year surveying and specimen-collecting expedition among the asteroids. Sent out by the Cranford Foundation, they had outfitted in the Martian colony of Tracolatown.

Loneliness and monotony change men queerly, undermine character and sanity. And three years is a long time. Quarrels flared up and became feuds. Between two members of the crew, Kalson and Wrymore, a particularly bitter hatred developed.

The crew were permitted no weapons, but Kalson was found shot to death. The crew and their quarters were searched by the officers. No weapons were found. There are many places small side arms can be hidden in the length of a ship.

Captain Wallace didn't confine Wrymore, for there was no definite proof of his guilt. But he informed him he would be turned over for trial at the first port reached.

Then there was the starboard-dorsal rocket jet, forever threatening disintegration, which no amount of tinkering ever made right. At any unusual sound the crew would freeze, their expressions set. Had that jet gone at last?

But with all this Wallace could cope. A stern man, old in the service, he was fully capable of controlling a crew unnerved by the ceaseless watching of infinity. He strode through the ship, as stern and calm as though in his office on Earth, holding the men to their duty, their sanity.

But when the "flame of all colors" appeared . . .

THE *Denebola* pointed her sharp nose homeward; the frozen, dead lumps of the asteroids dropped behind. A new and clearer expression found its way to the faces of the crew.

And then Wrymore flung himself out of a storage compartment, where he'd been sent for a replacement part during one of the interminable repair jobs on the rocket jet. He dashed into the engine room, and the astonished engineers dragged him from behind a convertor, a trembling wreck of a man, near to madness. He told them Kalson's ghost was in the storage cabin—he'd seen it, a crawling flame-like thing, in which all the colors of the spectrum flickered and twined.

They put him in sick bay—and the next "day" an electrician calmly reported to the



officer on watch the presence of "a funny-colored thing something like a slow flame" in the forward thermal chamber. Investigation revealed nothing but the inexplicable presence of an amount of hydrogen gas.

The ship seemed haunted. Men saw, or thought they saw, queer flames in every corner. Captain Wallace wondered if they were all going mad. Only he and Cargyle had yet to see the things. What was worse, things were disappearing—tools, supplies, replacement parts. More hydrogen made its appearance.

The effect of all this on the already teetering crew can be imagined. Captain Wallace left the problem of the mysterious flames to Calvin Markoe, the astrophysicist appointed by the Cranford people, and devoted himself to keeping the crew in hand.

But for the first time Wallace found himself helpless to stem the tide. The crew were too far gone, too fear-harried and space-crazy to know reason or fear punishment. And when corroded-looking holes began appearing in the walls of the ship, the mutiny burst out with all the savageness and fury of madness long suppressed.

Cargyle, the second officer, charged by a yelling, wild-eyed mob of crazy murderers, fought them coldly, shooting with deadly precision. His slow retreat brought him to the little cabin, where his position was almost impregnable, and which he knew connected through the secret passage with the control cabin.

He grinned as he crawled along the passage. What would the mutineers think when they charged the cabin and found it empty? They'd be sure the ship was haunted.

It was black as the Coal-Sack in the low-ceilinged tunnel. When a dim, elusive light began forming ahead of him, he first thought it a trick of his eyes, but as the thing brightened Cargyle halted and stared in amazement. At last he, too, was seeing one of the haunting flames.

In shape the thing did somewhat suggest a flame, but such a flame as never seen before. It was a writhing mozaic of colors that twined and faded one into the other. It curled as he watched, and the gleaming tip bowed slowly until it touched the floor.

The thing lay flat, pulsing slowly with a gorgeous display of color.

Cargyle forgot the mutineers, the beleaguered officers. In sheer bewilderment he watched the deliberate, enigmatic movements of the thing before him.

In all his wandering through the system he had never seen anything like this. What was it? A phenomenon of space, heretofore unknown, or was it—alive? The tip of the thing, bent to the floor, was moving delicately in small circles, touching and retreating, almost in the manner of a caterpillar on a leaf.

Cargyle was crouched on one knee. Abruptly his foot slipped, the heel coming down hard on the metal floor. The resultant clangor in that narrow tube was deafening. The flame-like entity sprang vibrantly erect. A huge red bubble, swelling, emerged from somewhere within its body and wound upward through vellicating strands of color. The thing paused there, its inner wonder of radiant light in flickering, nervous agitation. The tip, aloft again, twisted and writhed, once forming a superb, faultless spiral of brilliant scarlet.

**T**HE next moment it was moving toward him, and Cargyle, who had faced undaunted the thousand dangers, the unearthly foes of the spaceman, found himself shaking with a resistless horror.

Furious at himself, he took deliberate aim, and fired.

If the slip of his foot had been thunderous, the sound that followed the discharge of the blastor pistol was as that of worlds coming together. The walls of the passage shivered to the detonation, so terrific that an entrance door to the passage burst from its hinges, and fell into the cabin on which it opened.

Deafened, and blinded by the sudden flash, Cargyle waited helplessly. When his vision cleared he stared eagerly down the corridor. The flame-thing was where he had seen it last, motionless, unharmed!

As he stared in astonishment a roll of emerald smoke seemed to eddy under its surface, and it moved toward him. A recurrent wave of that strange horror surged through Cargyle. What *was* this thing? Was it sentient—did it perceive and threaten him?

He thrust his pistol back in his belt—



apparently it was useless against whatever stood before him—and started grimly forward. The thing waited, pale colors flowing fluidly through it. Suddenly it seemed to thin and tower and in its middle a ring appeared—a ring of dead black—and from that ring burst a blast of light; an intolerable, blinding beam that flamed in the very core of Cargyle's brain. Agony seared through him, rose to a piercing crescendo. Then a merciful blackness engulfed him, and the second officer crumpled to the floor. The flame-thing took up its incessant tapping and probing.

"WELL," said Wallace. "We thought you were dead. What did they do to you? There's no wound; apparently no injury. But you were as close to death as a man can get, and still come back. What happened?"

Cargyle choked and coughed. His brain and chest were burning agony. Dimly he struggled, and the flow of raw oxygen that was making him gasp ceased. The pain in his head was going. As the space-helmet was pulled off, he found himself regarding Captain Wallace and the astrophysicist, Markoe. They helped him to his feet, held him while he wavered back and forth unsteadily.

"The light—the light from the flame-thing," stammered Cargyle.

"It attacked you?" Markoe caught his arm. "How?"

"A light—a ray of some kind. Shot it into me. I was coming through the starboard passage . . . heard firing . . . the mutineers . . . where are they? Where's the crew?"

"They've gone mad completely," said Wallace. "We held them off at the pilot cabin—all the officers and a few loyal men are with me—and after an hour or so they went away. Half hour later we saw them through a port. They deserted in the two scouting rockets. What's left of the crew must have crowded into the two small ships; we didn't find a living man when we explored the ship. Except you. Where they expect to go, God knows. With a normal crew of four the air in a scout rocket is good for only about five days. Crowded they won't last two, and Mars is at least a week away."

"How did you know that oxygen would

bring me back?" asked Cargyle. They had started back toward the pilot room.

"Didn't," replied Wallace. "Markoe and I were inspecting the ship—we had to wear space-suits aft of the main air renewer. The whole stern of the ship's riddled. These flame-things doing it, Markoe says. We've got all the compartments closed off, but if he's right, the *Dencbola's* through. We found you on our way back. Looked as though you were dead. But we tried the oxygen from one of the helmets on you, and it eventually brought you around.

"What are they?" Cargyle asked. "These flames? Are they alive?"

"If they are," said Markoe, "they're like no kind of life ever known before. They set up a powerful field of some kind. I've been studying them back there in the stern. Trying to find out what they are." He held up some equipment—coils, and a detector.

"I turned a blastor pistol on one," said Cargyle. "It was only ten feet away—I couldn't have missed. And the thing never moved!"

A thunder of running feet brought the three men to a sudden halt. The next instant a man charged out of a side passage. At sight of them he halted and one glance at his face told them he was hopelessly insane. His eyes blazed with madness, and a line of foam ringed his mouth. In one hand he held a gun.

"Kalsion!" he screamed at them. "He's following me! He's dead! I killed him once! But he's here! I'm going to open the port and let the air out! Then Kalsion won't follow me. I'll kill him again! Then I won't see him crawling . . . and crawling. . . ."

He wheeled and ran down the corridor. "It's Wrymore!" gasped Captain Wallace. "I thought he'd gone with he rest. Come on! We've got to stop him!"

The three raced down the corridor after the madman, who had disappeared into the main passage leading to the 'midships airlock. They reached the corridor together and wheeled into it. There at their feet lay Wrymore—they almost fell over him.

Markoe turned the man over. "He's dead!" he exclaimed. "What could have—"

"Fright, I suppose," said Wallace. "Look."

THEY followed his gaze along the corridor. There, on the deck in the center of the passage, slender, mobile tip questing and probing, lay one of the flame-things. Markoe and the captain drew their pistols, but Cargyle, who had already one experience with these glowing enigmas, seized their arms.

"It's no good," he whispered. "Come away. It's no good. You can't hurt them."

"Well, by the Star of Saffta, I'm going to try," retorted Wallace, and he swung up his gun. The next moment the cavernous passage-way roared and trembled to the blastor's discharge, and the hissing uproar was intensified as Markoe fired in turn. The flame-thing sprang upright—grew longer—towered high above them.

"Run!" snapped Cargyle, diving into the side passage.

But the other two, struck with astonishment, stood where they were. Cargyle, peering cautiously around the corner, saw that ominous, dead-black ring in the flame-thing's middle.

Before he could draw back the intense and brilliant beam sprang out of the black ring, but this time it struck at Wallace and Markoe, and Cargyle, although momentarily blinded, was not subjected to the tearing pain that had snuffed out his consciousness. When he could see again, he perceived his companions sprawled on the deck—to all appearances, dead. Their attacker was again pursuing its endless testing of the floor.

Would the thing strike at him if he went to his companions' assistance? Cargyle shrugged. He'd have to take that chance.

Cautiously he moved out into the passage. Except for a noticeable increase in the rapidity of the pulsation of its shifting colors, the flame-thing ignored him. As quietly as possible he dragged first Captain Wallace and then the astrophysicist back into the shelter of the side passage.

What in God's Name were these flame-things, Cargyle wondered. They appeared to recognize and resent attack. They *must* be alive! Where had they come from, and was Markoe right? Were they slowly destroying the *Denebola*?

But he had no time for such questions now. He ran back to the space-suit, dropped when Wrymore had appeared, and

got the helmet and its oxygen tank. Captain Wallace looked lifeless; he was waxen-white and unbreathing. But there was a faint heart-action. Cargyle thrust the helmet over his head, and turned the flow-control.

He sat there an hour or more, and he thought the oxygen tank would have emptied before Markoe showed signs of life.

Both men were still dazed when they entered the pilot room. While Cargyle explained what had happened to them, and the manner of his own survival, his glance noted the signs of battle. Blackened pits, marks of blastor discharges, spattered the walls and furniture. Equipment had been shattered by chance shots. The inner lens of one of the ports had been drilled through the center, long cracks radiating from the spot. It had been hastily repaired, fused together with *thurlite*.

Most of the men wore bloody bandages, and one lay unconscious. Chapman, the chief pilot, was pacing nervously back and forth before the dead control board; the other men were now dropping back into attitudes of listless dejection.

"Why are we drifting?" Cargyle asked. The ship was silent, vibrationless. All rockets were inoperative—they were sweeping helplessly through space, undirected.

"Why?" growled Simms. "Because those crazy devils took as much fuel as they could and then drained the tanks. We're falling into an orbit—"

"Speed?"

"Roughly ten per second. We were trying to contact Tracolatown, but the nutineers smashed the hull plates. Parker and Swift are out on the hull now, working on the plates."

"Then we're—"

"We're sunk, unless we can fix those plates and get a patrol ship out to us."

A RED light over the viso-set winked, and then glowed steadily. Barfield, the viso operator, sprang to his control board and swiftly manipulated switches and dials. The viso-screen remained blank, but from the speaker came the familiar uproar produced by the vibrations that flood space. Barfield swung the controls, seeking the wave-length of the station at Tracolatown.

"Calling the *Denebola*," said the speaker, hollowly, a moment later. "Calling the *Denebola* . . . where are you, *Denebola*? 3TRA45 calling. Tracolatown calling the *Denebola*."

"They've got those hull plates working, Captain," cried Barfield. "That's the Martian operator, Nunglon! This is the *Denebola*, Nunglon!" he continued, speaking into the phone. "The *Denebola* calling Tracolatown! A mutiny . . . the crew deserted. They drained our tanks and we're drifting. Here's our position—" He turned to Chapman. "What is the position?"

The pilot began reading off the ship's co-ordinates. "Send him those. They're some hours old, but they can start on them, and correct course as soon as our present position is determined."

"Stop!" interrupted Markoe. "Wait a minute. We can't call a ship out here. What about the flames?"

They looked at him. In the silence two men in space-suits entered the cabin; stood still, surprised. "What's the matter?" asked one, crawling from his suit. "The plates are working, ain't they? What's wrong?"

"What's the flames got to do with it?" demanded Simms. "To hell with the flames! We can transfer to the patrol ship if the *Denebola's* completely destroyed. We could even navigate her back in space-suits, if she'll still move. Go on, Barfield, send our position."

"Mr. Simms," said Wallace, quietly, "I'll give the orders. We'll hear Mr. Markoe's objection. What about the flames, sir?"

"Just this, Captain," said Markoe. "If we call a ship out here and transfer to it, what's to stop these things from transferring, too? Any ship that comes near us is done for, the same as the *Denebola*, unless we find some way to destroy them."

"So you tell us," growled Simms. "And ask us to sacrifice our lives on your guesses. I won't do it, I tell you! You don't know what these things are, or where they came from. You know nothing about them."

"They came from the asteroids, I believe," replied Markoe. "Give me a day or two more. There must be some way of destroying them. And have you forgotten the oath you took? The oath of the spaceman, never to return to port with an

unknown disease that might become a plague? These flames are included . . . in the spirit of that oath, at least. I tell you we can't call a ship's crew out here, possibly to their death!"

"That's the answer," said Wallace, firmly. "We call no other ship until these things are gone. Operator, tell Tracolatown we'll call them later. Markoe, it's up to you now."

"I can't tell Nunglon the ship's full of funny-colored flames," protested Barfield. "He'll think we're all space-crazy!"

"Tell him we haven't our position—that we're working it out," instructed Wallace. "Tell him we're away off the ecliptic, and that it will take time."

For the next three days they saw little of Markoe. He spent hours in the airless stern of the ship, where he had set up a rough laboratory. Occasionally he appeared to renew the oxygen tank of his helmet. A glance at his face was sufficient. They asked him nothing.

Cargyle joined him frequently, and tried to be of assistance, but the astrophysicist's experiments meant little to the second officer.

Once Markoe turned to him and said, tensely, "There's a wave-length, or a modulation, that will break down their field. I know it! But how to find it? How to find it in time!"

"Markoe," said Cargyle, "why haven't they attacked the control cabin? It's the one compartment of the ship where you never see them. There must be some reason."

Markoe looked at him a moment, then shook his head. "Chance, that's all. They started in the tail of the ship, and they're working forward. There's nothing in the pilot cabin to stop them. I've tried the viso-set's wave-lengths. Doesn't bother them."

But, unreasonably, Cargyle clung to the belief that there was something about the control cabin. . . .

IN the high vacuum of those airless cabins there was no diffusion of light—the shadows were deep, ink-black. Through the jagged holes in the hull—where holes in the inner and outer skin coincided—entered faint star-light; on Markoe's table dim lights gleamed; and everywhere the

gorgeous colors of the flame-things flickered. It was a weird and eerie setting: a suitable background for the incredible beings that moved against it.

Danger was there also, which was the principle reason Cargyle spent so much time there. Should Markoe be struck down by one of the flame-things he might suffocate, if his oxygen tank was nearly empty, or turned off by the fall, before anyone came to him.

But the flame-things paid them little attention. The men moved little, and then slowly.

They watched them reproduce. A tiny branch flame would appear. At first it would be ochre-colored, but as it lengthened it acquired the prismatic character of its parent. Then, abruptly, it broke off, and was a separate individual.

It was upon these "infant" flames that most of Markoe's experiments were made—they were unable to discharge the paralyzing ray of their parents, and they could be moved about by persuading them to mount a loose piece of metal.

One cabin in the stern Cargyle avoided. It held the dead—a half dozen bodies laid side by side, each under a white sheet. In the sharp mosaic of pale light and deep shadow, these six glimmering shapes, austere and rigid in the final stillness of death, struck a cold foreboding into the beholder. Preserved in the airless cold of space, there was something prophetic in their fixity.

On the third day the men closed off the last compartment. They were confined now to the control room, unless they wished to visit Markoe's laboratory, or roam the ship in space-suits.

The control cabin contained a separate plant for light, heat and air-renewal. Batteries, and a small generator operated by its own motor and tank of fuel, were banked beneath the floor. It constituted another defense against mutineers.

Periodically Wallace took sights and computed their position. Simms made no effort to relieve him. The chief officer had discarded coat and cap; dark hair, uncombed, hung across his forehead. From beneath it his shadowed eyes watched the captain sullenly.

Strain marked them all. Some sat in hopeless silence; others restlessly paced the slow hours away. Parker, alone among

those aboard the dying *Denebola*, seemed unaffected. He busied himself repairing the damaged equipment, devoting most of his time to the starboard dorsal rocket timer, which resisted all his efforts. Although it sparked each time a terminal was contacted, something inside the timer was out of order, for it boiled and hissed.

Once Simms snarled at him: "Parker, you fool! Let it alone! What the hell's the use of that now?"

Each compartment was separated from the adjoining one by an airlock, left open when both compartments contained an atmosphere. As Markoe and Cargyle emerged from the airlock they heard Simms' voice.

"—and we're desperate, Captain," he was saying. "You're got to call Tracolatown and give them our position. Do you want us to die like rats? How much longer will these batteries last? Perhaps it's too late now. Let Markoe stay here and play with these things if he wants. I'm not!"

"Mr. Simms, I've warned you once," said Wallace, sternly. "If you forget yourself again, I shall place you under arrest."

"How do you know they will attack another ship, Captain Wallace?" joined in Chapman. "I agree with Simms. We're sacrificing our lives for a trifle. Even if they should transfer with us, the patrol ship that picked us up could get back to Mars before they'd done much damage. Are you going to kill us all to save a few holes in a patrol rocket's hull?"

Only one feeble light burned in the pilot cabin; the others were extinguished to conserve power. Cargyle noticed the air had a thick, dry taste to it.

"I CAN answer some of those questions, with your permission, sir," said Markoe, stepping forward. Wallace nodded. "Do you realize, Mr. Chapman," continued Markoe, "what it would mean if we led these things back to Mars? They reproduce; multiply where their food supply is greatest. Can't you picture it? From Mars to Earth to Venus. And what would they leave behind?"

"You know they're living things, and what their food supply is?" demanded Chapman.

"They're not protoplasmic, but what's life? They're alive in the sense we mean. They reproduce. Cargyle and I both have

seen them. And as for their food supply—yes, I can tell you definitely what it is.

"These things are not matter—they're pure energy. I've seen nothing like it before. They're energy concentrated and undissipating—held together somehow. And that energy behaves in a life-like manner. It feeds on energy, and it grows.

"Call them earthworms of space. They break up matter—do something to the big, complex atoms of the heavy elements to break them down. And when they are done, the light, simple atoms are left—hydrogen, and helium. That's what's happening to the *Denebola*—the earthworms of space feed on the energy in the heavy atoms of her metal hull, and we find traces of hydrogen. The rest of it drifts out into space. And that will go on till there's no metal left. They haven't attacked living things. Maybe they can't. But they'll never leave the *Denebola* while a shred of metal remains. Unless they can be destroyed or driven away there's no hope for us."

"You mean—" began Chapman.

"I mean, sir, that we dare not call any ship to our assistance while these things exist. I have found no way of destroying them. If we lead them back to Mars, and they prove indestructible, we would doom the system. They would be carried to every planet. And the planets themselves are food for them."

"Mightn't other physicists succeed where you fail, Markoe?" asked Chapman, with a sneer. "Maybe you're not as good as you think! We have plenty of brilliant men in the labs and universities. They'd probably lick these spaceworms in no time."

"There are many men more brilliant than myself," replied Markoe, ignoring the sneer. "And if they can be destroyed those men would find the way. But it would take time. Time! I am not in error about that, Mr. Chapman. Barring a lucky accident it would take months of experiment. Think of the loss of life that would precede their success! And it's fully possible that they are indestructible. Lord, man! Will you gamble the fate of our whole civilization just to save your own skin? These flames are of disease of metal—maybe a disease of planets. By our oath, we must find the cure—or not return!"

"Damned nonsense!" broke in Simms.

"To hell with that stuff! Why haven't these flames attacked the planets before, if they're all you say? And if they've just come into the system we can't stop them. They're probably on the planets already. What good will our death do? I don't have to be a physicist to see that these things can live in space. They don't need heat or air. They can go where they like—"

"That's where you're wrong, Mr. Simms," interrupted Markoe. "They can't go where they like. It's true they need no atmosphere. But they do need *food*! They can move through empty space only relatively short distances; the force which holds them together consumes tremendous quantities of energy. When the *Denebola* is gone they will break up, die, if you want to call it that, unless an asteroid or meteor is within their reach. And they aren't new to the system, in my opinion. I suppose they're as old on the asteroids as life is on Earth; older, maybe, but they can't cross the enormous gulf between the asteroid belt and the nearest planets, Mars and Jupiter."

"You're space crazy!" retorted Simms. "Why, in that length of time they'd have reduced a quantity of matter a thousand times as great as all the asteroids—"

"You forget the distances between the asteroids themselves. The normal 'death-rate' of the earthworms of space on the asteroids must be very high. And their consumption of stone and ore is much slower; I've timed them on samples we collected."

SIMMS shook his head, as though to clear it. His eyes were blood-shot and wild, his face sullen. "I don't give a damn for all that! That's just guessing. Maybe he's right and maybe he ain't. I say he's space-crazy, and drunk on bad air. Earthworms of space! Hell! Talk and talk and talk, while we're all dying! Barfield, get Tracolatown! We're calling a patrol ship out to us. Go on, start your set!"

"Barfield, sit still!" Wallace's quiet voice was like the sharp edge of a knife. "Mr. Simms, you are under arrest. Mr. Chapman, I remind you that you are an officer. It should not be necessary. I have seen raw apprentices who behaved better—"

Chapman made a move toward the cap-

tain, belligerently. But Simms was before him. "Do you see that?" he cried, pointing wildly at a port beyond which the cold stars gleamed. "Do you know what that is, out there? It's death! Death, do you understand, you fool? And it's coming in here—it's closing on us, while you stand bleating about—"

"He's right, and I'm with Simms," shouted Chapman, suddenly. "Captain or no captain, we're calling Tracolatown, and the rest of you interfere with us at your peril!"

A cold stillness, an awful sense of impending disaster grew in that shadowy cabin. Only the captain moved, stepping a pace or two away. His gray eyes under the thick, white brows, were gleaming coldly, and his right hand hung suggestively near the holster at his hip. When he spoke his voice rang with scorn. "Drop your weapons, both of you! You disgrace the service! You are cowards!"

"Coward, am I? I'll show you, you old fool!" With the glint of madness burning in his eyes, Simms swung his hand down to his holster, brought it up holding a blastor pistol. Chapman's hand moved. The spell holding Cargyle snapped and he sprang into action. Chapman was nearest him. Cargyle swung from the hip—smashed his fist into the pilot's jaw. The man went over backward; crashed on the floor; lay still. At the same instant two brilliant flashes blazed almost as one in the gloom—two thunderous detonations roared and echoed in the narrow cabin. Cargyle's eyes sought the two principals in the swift drama.

For an incredibly protracted moment Simms and the captain stood staring at each other, each bent slightly forward. Cargyle noticed abstractedly that the force of the explosions of their guns had thrown their hands up slightly.

Then Simms slowly straightened, stretched, stood tall as he could, muscles straining. Abruptly he collapsed and fell in a limp and lifeless heap upon the floor. Slow blood welled through the back of his shirt.

"For Mr. Simms' death I shall take full responsibility, should I ever be in a position to make a report of the occurrence," said Wallace, and thrust his blastor pistol back in its holster. "Parker, Swift—re-

move his body. And relieve Mr. Chapman of his pistol."

THE slow hours crept by. Men no longer spoke. They sat apart, unmoving, in the shadowed cabin. Markoe alone was absent—at work in his laboratory in the stern; hopeless, but fighting to the last. Parker lay sleeping peacefully.

The air was still, and faintly musty. Beyond the ports the stars blazed. The ship was rolling slightly, and at long intervals the sun, small with distance, rose sluggishly in the starboard ports, shot shafts of brighter light into the cabin.

In the silence a clock's tick was loud, portentous—a funeral drum attending the passing seconds. With a curse, one of the men got up and stopped its ticking.

Cargyle was lost in a deep reverie, remembering Earth, his home, his parents, green fields bright with spring foliage, the great cities he had known, the mountains, seas. In his imagination he heard the music of Earth, and saw the sunrise. It was very far away now, and lost forever. But he had known the price the spaceman paid. He had no regrets.

Into his line of vision crept a pale blur of light and his eyes focused on it. It was a flame-thing—one of the earthworms of space. They had at last invaded the pilot cabin. Idly he watched it. It was no more than a foot in length—an "infant." It made a feeble glow against the wall as it came slowly toward them, its tip moving like the tongue of a snake.

Parker awoke, and made a small disturbance as he groaned, yawned, and got up and helped himself to water and food. When he gathered his tools and started for the recalcitrant rocket timer one of the anonymous shapes in the shadow growled: "For Lord's sake!"

"Go to hell," said Parker, and crouched down over the timer.

Cargyle grinned. With so little time left—and to spend it on a broken piece of machinery! But after all, maybe Parker's way was the sanest. He was moving the manual control, and the timer crackled, and spat fat, blue sparks.

The flame-thing suddenly recoiled, drew back as though stung. Cautiously it advanced again; again sprang back. It rose upright, stood weaving and swaying.

"You fool! Don't you know we're—" "Sure I know!" Parker shut off the timer to turn and answer. "We're going out! To hell with it! Sit there and cry about it, if you want! But before I go I'll know what's wrong with this damned thing!"

The "infant" flame was advancing again. Parker switched on the timer, and began his rhythmic movement of the control. The instant the timer began its hissing little beat, the "spaceworm" stopped, sprang erect, began twisting, winding. It had approached quite close. A tiny sound came from it—a thin, high squealing—the first sound Cargyle had ever heard them make.

Something strange was happening to the spaceworm. It had lost its unity; its upper end was splitting up into fine threads of twisting color that spread out, separated.

The squealing ceased; there was a final faint *pop!* a brighter flash of color, then the thing was gone!

Cargyle at first watched curiously, then with a growing intentness. When the spaceworm vanished he sat staring. Slowly his eyes swung around to the timer, mumbling feebly as Parker moved its control. It spat its brisk, blue sparks.

And suddenly Cargyle got it! The timer . . . Parker working on it hour after hour . . . and no spaceworms in the control cabin—no spaceworms in the cabin till Parker slept, and the timer was still!

"Barfield!" he yelled, in a voice that brought the men to their feet. "Send our position! We've won! We're going in!"

Lord, was there time? He grabbed up a space-helmet, switched on its tiny set, and shouted into the speaker: "Come back, Markoe! I've found it—the wave-length! Come back!"

IT was simple, the way Markoe explained it later. The lucky accident, the chance in a million, had happened. The field which the broken timer built up when operated neutralized whatever force held the flame-things together. The spaceworms could only retreat before that field; if they were caught in it their cohesion vanished, and their energy fled—they "died."

It was only necessary, Markoe said, to analyze and then amplify that field; send it pulsing out into space. Most of the spaceworms would be caught in it instantly, gathered, as they were, upon the *Denebola*. If any were further out in space they would be driven back before the field, or overtaken and destroyed.

The heavy hopelessness that had filled the control cabin vanished. Lights went on. Barfield snapped on his set.

"The *Denebola* . . . calling Tracolatown. Calling 3TRA45 . . . this is the *Denebola* . . ." Strongly, urgently, the call went out.

"Can we last?" Cargyle asked. "If we contact them quickly," replied Wallace. "At the worst, we can hold out a while in space-suits. But we've got to pick up the Tracolatown station soon."

Markoe and Parker set to work on the timer; Captain Wallace and Cargyle checked and rechecked their position; everyone seemed to find something to do. But all activity stopped, men stood motionless to listen, as they heard it—faint at first, but swiftly stronger, clearer, even to the tinge of anxiety in the voice.

". . . where are you, *Denebola?* Report your position at once. We have been calling you. What is your position, *Denebola?* Patrol rocket ready to take off. Tracolatown calling the *Denebola* . . ."

The musty air seemed fresher as that voice echoed in the small control room.

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# The Man Who Killed the World



**PLANET STORIES Short-Short Story**

**By RAY KING**

**Groff ruled the world through Fear. Fear of his awful power . . . his twisted, mad brain. For one day that brain would crack. When it did, the World would dissolve in cataclysmic Chaos.**

**I**N his little tower, perched at the very peak of the great terraced pile of buildings which was his home and his citadel, Peter Groff sat brooding with hatred. The city, its factories, its vast plowed fields, lay stretched below him. Millions of humans, at play in little games. How he hated them! And they hated him—hated and feared him. It made him chuckle. For all his life he had worked and schemed and fought to make himself a power. The richest, most powerful man in the world—he had attained it. They had called him cruel, in his youth, with his ruthless business methods. He had laughed. Then they had no longer dared call him anything which would anger him. And he had laughed at that, while he had bought their governments and their armies with his money.

He was laughing now as he thought of it. In seventy years he had made the name Peter Groff a thing at which to tremble. Over all the earth, from the heads of his groveling puppet governments down to the lowliest child driving a plow in the fields, there was no one who did not secretly fear Groff, the power of his money, the sound of anger in his voice. Here in his citadel his servants trembled—and hated him. It was funny, because by their methods they had gotten nothing; and he had gotten everything.

Alone in his little tower, he sat and brooded. There was little else to do now, and he enjoyed it—this contemplation of himself and his achievements. The mirror beside which he sat reflected his image. He

stared at himself. His trusted companion. His face, thin-lipped, was grim with its power. His eyes gleamed with it—eyes at which everyone shivered with fear. The banked rows of his television tuning knobs were within reach of his hand. And he decided that it would be amusing to look and to listen from some of the newscasters' vantage points at what was transpiring down in the city streets. He chose one in the factory district, over by the river. They were the people who had least.

The little cathode mirror presently was glowing with the scene he had selected. It was a tube-lit city arcade, far down by the lowest level of the Inter-urban railway. Subterranean shops were along its sides—places where people with the tiniest fraction of money might spend it for something which wasn't worth having.

And as he stared, from one of the shops a young couple came—a dark-haired, slender young man and a girl who was pretty, and who was laughing. They were poorly dressed. They had nothing. But they were laughing; and suddenly they were struggling as the young man fastened upon the girl's dress the bauble he had bought, and then was trying to kiss her for his payment. The scuffle was over in a moment; and Groff heard from his microphone the girl's gasping, murmured words: "Oh, Jac—I'm so happy—"

Groff stiffened. His thin, lined face was grim as he reached and cut off the image and the murmuring voice. . . .

Something happened to Peter Groff that summer night. He wasn't conscious of it;



he only knew that he was enraged as though an attack had been made upon him. Atrocious things which menaced him needed crushing. He pondered it, grim with his planning. . . .

Near dawn, some of his servants knew that something had happened. They heard him, with his wild laughter coming in an eerie muffled blur from his little tower. Then young Peller dared go up to see what might be the matter.

"Is there anything you need of me, Master?" he asked.

Groff was staring from his great arm-chair. "Not now, Peller. But I've just discovered how to solve the situation very quickly. The Master has just made up his mind, Peller."

It was gratifying to see the terror and confusion on Peller's face. Groff's gesture drove the servant away, so that he would go down into the corridors of the citadel and whisper with all the other servants as they trembled, thinking the Master might be displeased with them.

THE thing took Groff more than a year. The thousands of men whom he sent secretly throughout the world did as he commanded, and did not know why they were doing it. Poor fools. The great scientist who for so many years had been in Groff's employ gave him the technical knowledge he sought. Fools. All fools. They could not guess what he was really after. The lies he told them which awakened their cupidity were so easy for them to believe. No servant could know what any other servant was doing. No one could piece it together. There was only the masterful Groff in his tower weaving the poisonous threads of his gigantic enterprise into a pattern which only himself could see.

Then at last he was ready. He had tracked down the identity of the dark-haired, slender young worker whom the laughing girl had called Jac. And there came the momentous night when he sent for the young man and the girl, and white-faced, frightened, they stood before him in his little tower.

Groff lolled back in his big chair as he quietly regarded them. "Quite an honor for you, isn't it?" he said. "Seeing me in person."

"What do you want of us?" the young man murmured.

It was pleasing to Groff, to see his terror. "I wanted to thank you," Groff said ironically. "It happened that I saw you two, one night about a year ago. You made me realize what I must do. So I thought I would tell you about it."

They could only stand wordless, frightened. Groff sucked in his breath with anticipatory pleasure. In a moment now they would be more than frightened; they would be utterly terrified—and their terror would spread like a wave around the world.

Groff was lashing himself into grim anger. "You are going to die," he said. At the girl's sudden little whimpering gasp he raised his hand. "That sort of think won't help you any. You and everyone on earth—this is your last night of health. Tomorrow, at dawn, you will all start swiftly to sicken. In a week, a month—you will be dead."

How well they knew that his threats were never empty. They were huddled together now, with trembling arms around each other as they stared at him. He lashed himself further into anger as he told them that he realized how millions of people were conspiring to the end that Groff might suffer misfortune. A menace which he could no longer tolerate. . . . How those millions would squirm as they saw death coming upon them! The supreme power of Groff at last demonstrated to its ultimate. Queer that he had never thought of this logical climax to his great career—not until that little incident a year ago when this young couple had caused him to envisage it.

He was telling them now what he had done. . . . The little depots all over the earth, compressed with caged bacteria. Little time-bombs—all to explode within thirty minutes of this present instant. The women and children, the aged, would die first. But the polluted air, the contagion spreading everywhere—in a week, a month, the swift and deadly bacteria would leave no one alive.

"You—are going to do this to us?" young Jac murmured at last.

"Why not? It is my destiny." Never had Groff felt so quiet and comfortable a thrill as now; and this was only the be-

ginning. "Others before me have tried their little conquests," he said with his grim smile. "Men who wanted power, and got it, just in a small way and for a little while. There was one—I recall reading about him—one who was so foolish to disclose all his plans by writing them in a book, years before he had a chance to accomplish them. I am not like him. I tell you now, when there is a scant thirty minutes before your inevitable annihilation begins."

"You hate your fellow men so much," Jac murmured impulsively, "you would kill yourself, just for the pleasure of killing the rest of us?"

To die. It sent so strangely a queer little shiver over Groff. He had always felt it; but no one could ever know it, save himself. How many times his vaunted reckless bravery had awed his fellow man! He sat very straight now, and his eyes flashed.

"I have never been one to fear death," he said.

**B**UT, as always before, he knew now that he was safe enough. His armed citadel here was wholly safe from outside attack, even if the stricken multitudes should find brief strength to try and assail him. His retainers, thinking they were safe, would remain at their posts. Poor fools. At the last, even they would be stricken and Groff would retreat up here. Impregnable, here in the tower and its neighbor little rooms, he could maintain his unpolluted air, and eat the food and drink the water which he had stored here in such abundance. Perhaps even, nature would let him live the longer for his isolation.

Master of the earth. The man who owned everything. Pride swelled him again as he thought of that poor little fool who had only wanted to make himself the titular leader of the earth, and in his own fatuous conceit had written it all down in his little book.

"You have good reason to fear me," Groff said. "You realize it now?"

The young couple were white-faced and trembling as they clung to each other. And suddenly the girl murmured,

"I—I pity you."

Groff caught at it, with his sudden wild

rage flooding him. "You lie!" he rasped. "You are frightened. You are terrified of me and my revenge."

"Revenge?" young Jac muttered. "I wonder what we have done to you—except that we live and breathe and try to be happy." His arm held the trembling girl closer; and he turned and gazed into her face, her moist red lips quivering, her eyes like misted stars as she regarded him. "If we are both to die," he murmured, "still we will have each other, Manya."

"Yes," she whispered.

Then it seemed that the youth was not quite so afraid as he straightened and fronted Groff. "Your revenge, when you kill us both, is not quite complete," he said with a twisted smile.

They turned at Groff's gesture of dismissal. At the head of the great staircase which went down from the tower, dominant with his power, Groff stood with his heavy ornamented robe tossed over one shoulder and all his emblazoned insignia dangling on his chest. The young couple were still clinging to each other as they descended. Then they were a little blob, dwarfed by distance, dwindling into total insignificance. It was only a trick of lighting of the great staircase, of course; but suddenly, just before they vanished, it seemed that the light had magnified them into something gigantic . . .

**T**HE thing was over at last. It was a week? Two weeks? Three weeks? Groff had kept no track of the time. Exhausted with exulting he lay back in his chair with his instruments around him. How wonderful it had been, The ultimate conquest. The power of Groff and Groff alone. So many times it had made him think of those other conquerors—those little men of history who had been thrilled by their trips of triumph into some petty land their armies had devastated. That little man in his aircar, gazing in triumph, swelling himself with his pride as he gazed at the death and destruction he had brought to just one petty nation in three weeks . . .

Groff's triumph was over now. He had seen much of it, with his telescopes ranging the city, and on his television mirrors before the television went blank. It had been queer, how people, stricken so that they knew they had only a few days to

live, had rushed around bringing their families together. Queer that then they had not really seemed afraid. Queer how the churches had been crowded, with doomed people who clung together and had a strange look on their faces as though they were not afraid to die . . .

Then it was over. From the immense height and safety of his little tower Groff sat surveying his conquered world. The man who had everything. The ultimate of personal power. And what would he do with it now? Queer thought! It was so queer, so whimsical a thought that he chuckled, and then was laughing at it—laughing for so long that it left him breathless. There was nobody here to hate. That was another queer thought.

Was it days, or weeks or years, that now he sat alone in his little tower, surveying his empty world? There was nothing to

do but gloat with pride at the greatness of himself; and to laugh at the whimsicality of his hungry need to be angry at his enemies who now did not exist. He had tired of that. Then there were times when he thought it would be satisfying if he killed himself, like the man who had written the book and who could not live when he realized that the time had come when no one feared him. But Groff found that he had not the courage to do that.

It tired him to laugh so much, so that often now he sat, just anguished with emptiness. It was queer how that vision of the young couple going down his staircase seemed always here to haunt and to puzzle him. What had been about them that was so gigantic? The thought enraged him, because he knew now that it was something he might have wanted—something he had failed to get.

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# DICTATOR OF TIME

An Exciting Novel  
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Humanity against the Arch-Brain of the Future! Twentieth-Century Larry Wilson and Sandra Day lead the Armageddon of the Ages against Harg, crafty, vain monster-intellect bent on warping Man to his Inhuman Will!

LARRY WILSON was going to miss his train. He swung from his cab at Philadelphia's Broad Street Station, glanced swiftly at his wrist-watch, tossed a bill in the general direction of the cabby, then dashed for the staircase that led to the train platform. His watch showed exactly 10:59. The New York express was scheduled to leave at eleven sharp.

Behind him, morning traffic made its customary din in the streets of the Quaker City. Automobile horns *whonked* belligerently. Radio loudspeakers blared from the doorways of tiny Market Street shops. A newsboy bellowed headlines on the European war situation. A bus chugged into the station, disgorged its cargo of human freight, lumbered ponderously on down the street. A vendor offered dried lavender; his whine was a thin, discordant note in the hum of a busy city.

But Larry Wilson, intent only on gaining the train platform above, did not notice these things. He brushed by a puffing matron at the foot of the stairs, steamed past a descending red-cap, and noticed with only casual interest as he took the steps three at a time a silken-clad calf before him. He might make it yet, he thought hopefully, if—

Then, suddenly, something was indefinably *wrong!*

Larry had ascended these stairs dozens of times in the past, both leisurely and, as now, at top speed. But at no time had they ever been like this! His stride faltered; then, even as the first, tiny fingers of wonderment plucked at his bewildered brain, he realized that the bright electric lights that limned the staircase had vanished. That in their place was a dull, unearthly, grayish glow that seemed to emanate equally from the walls, the staircase, and from the roof above him.

His foot, reaching for the next step, encountered no support. He staggered, thrown off balance, and stumbled forward to his hands and knees. Yet he was not

bruised. As he fell he realized, with numb astonishment, that the steps were no longer there!

Wildly he scrambled to save himself. His shoulder collided with something fragrantly yielding. His outthrust hand clutched warm, firm flesh cased in sheer silk. Then he was falling helplessly, headlong, dizzily, down a dim tunnel of spinning grayness—and he was rolling over and over on a warm, grassy turf. The scent of flower-laden air was in his nostrils.

And a voice was saying indignantly, "Well, really! If you don't mind—!"

IN one hand Larry still clutched his bag. In the other—. He flushed, relaxed his grip in swift embarrassment. The girl was the one whom he had glimpsed before him on the steps of the Broad Street Station. It was her ankle that, in his moment of blind groping, his hand had clutched.

"I—I'm sorry!" gulped Larry. "I didn't mean to be—" Then he stopped, staring about him transfixed. "But what's this? Where the he—I mean, where in blazes are we?"

They were lying on a grassy plain horizoned by a forest of towering trees that reached aimlessly toward a wan and cloudless sky. The girl, her own blue eyes wide in astonishment, forgot her pique in amazement that matched his.

"I don't know. I was running for the train—"

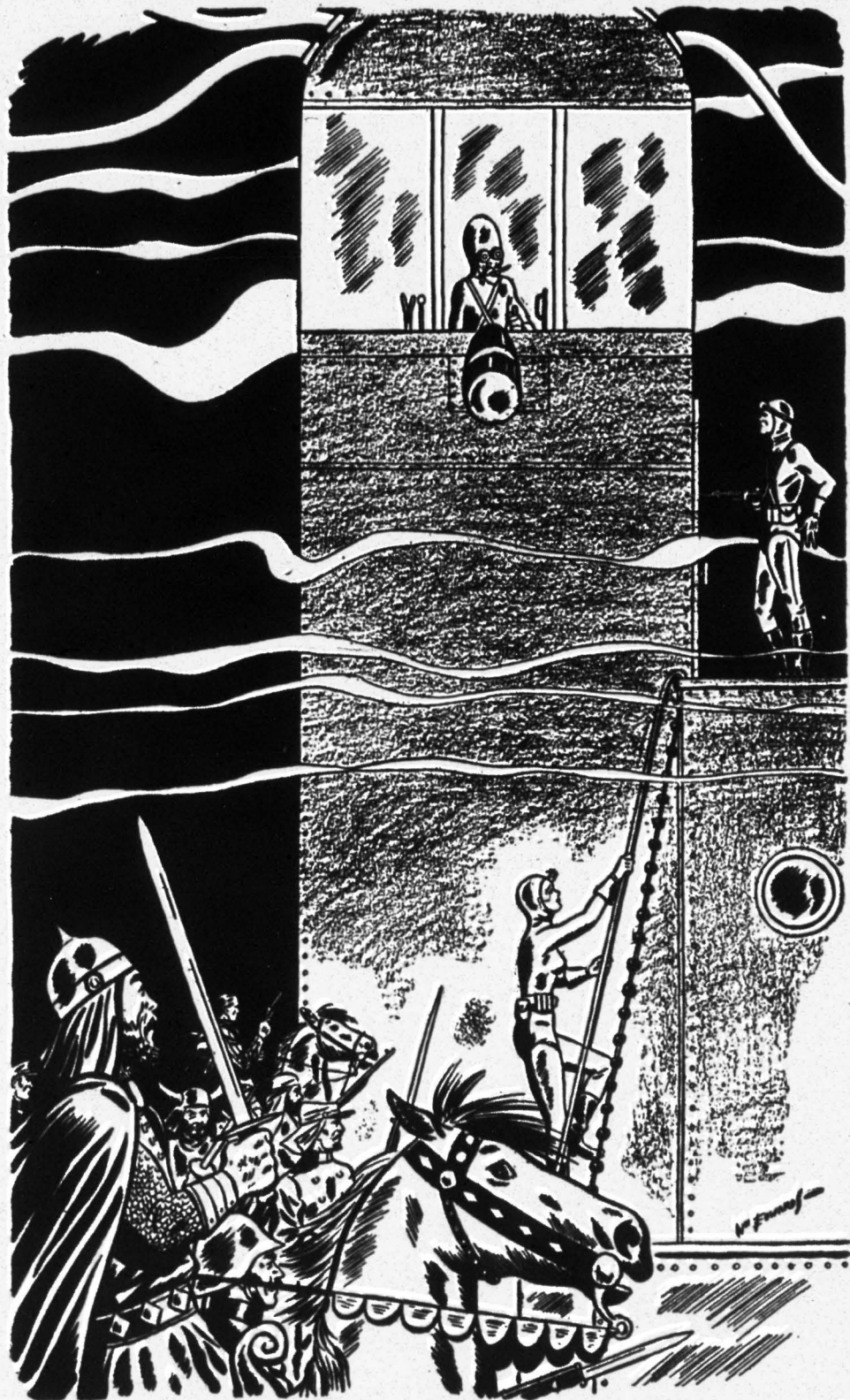
"So was I. I saw you on the steps. Just then the staircase seemed to become strangely gray—"

"And it moved!" added the girl. "I remember now. Something like a *ripple* passed over it—"

"I didn't see that," admitted Larry. "I was too busy running. But—but where are we, anyway?"

A touch of panic flickered in the girl's eyes.

"We—we couldn't be dead?"



Larry shook his head. "I thought of that. But it isn't likely. Not both of us. One of us might have fallen down the steps and broken a neck—but not two, together. And there was no explosion or anything like that. I don't see—"

Suddenly the girl gasped, clutching his arm.

"Look! Over there in the trees!"

Larry looked—and moved swiftly. With a jerk, he ripped open his bag, pawed through its contents, and came up with a snub-nosed automatic.

"Get behind me!" he shouted. "I don't know what's going on here, but—"

"Don't shoot!" The girl's hands tightened swiftly about his wrist, dragged it down as he drew a careful bead on the towering beast that, from the edge of the grassy glen, surveyed the two through tiny, myopic eyes.

An incredible mountain of flesh it was. More than eighty feet long with a rubbery, elephantine hide that draped its ugly carcass in sinewy ripples. Its long neck, surmounted by a ridiculously minute head, twitched nervously from one side to the other as its inadequate nostrils strove to identify this strange, tantalizingly foreign scent.

As Larry watched spellbound, the gigantic monster broke into lumbering motion. Its huge feet created thunder as it crashed blindly through the forest, leaving in its wake a swath of broken young trees and trampled underbrush.

"It won't attack us," explained the girl in answer to Larry's questioning stare. "It's herbivorous. That is, if it's what I think it is. It was probably more frightened than we were. But how it ever got here, in *this* age—"

"For Pete's sake, what was it?"

The girl shook her head. "Unless," she answered slowly, "I've gone completely mad—and I may easily have done so—it was a brontosaurus! An ancient reptile of the Mesozoic Age. *The last one should have died over a hundred million years ago!*"

"Preposterous!" gasped Larry.

"I know it's preposterous. But we saw it. Which means—" The girl turned a puzzled face to him. "Do you know anything about Time?"

"Time?" Larry glanced at his watch.

"Why, it's exactly 10:59. Say, that's funny! It was just 10:59 when I was running up those steps."

"I don't mean that kind of time. Though that may have something to do with it. I mean, do you know anything about the scientific theory of Time? For if our experience means anything . . . if that really was a brontosaurus we saw . . . and if your wristwatch has stopped at 10:59. . . ."

"Yes?" said Larry.

"Then," said the girl solemnly, "somehow or other you and I have experienced a temporal shift outside the ken of Earthly physics. We are lost in Time!"

"NEATLY put, young lady!" said a quiet, approving voice. "Very neatly decided. I should not have expected such quick intelligence from one of your era."

Larry and the girl turned swiftly. Standing near them was a tiny man, no higher than Larry's shoulders. He wore a curious one-piece garment of woven metal fabric, on the belt or harness of which depended a host of studded instruments, pouches, and oddly shaped tools or ornaments.

Upon his overlarge, almost bulbous head was a sort of cap which completely covered his scalp and ears. Strange telescopic glasses, covering his bulging eyes, lent his face an elfin quality. There was a pleased smile on his lips—one which disclosed a pale, double ridge of cartilage in his upper and lower jaws where his teeth should have been. His face was smooth and hairless.

"Who," demanded Larry, "are you? And how did you get here?"

"You were so engrossed in the brontosaurus," said the diminutive stranger, "that you did not notice my approach. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Harg-Ofortu, Chief Archeologist of the Planetary Museum. And you?"

"Larry Wilson. Civil engineer. And this is Miss—Miss—"

"Sandra Day," supplied the girl. "I am—or was—assistant curator of the Philadelphia Museum."

"So?" The little man nodded delightedly. "Don't tell me, now. Let me guess!" He placed a wizened finger on his temple, studied the two carefully. "Those garments . . . and that antique firearm . . . your early Amerglish speech . . . I should

judge you to be from that period just preceding the Communal World State. About the year—let me see—the year 2000 A.D. Is that right?"

"You know damned well it's right!" snorted Larry. "This is the year 1940, of course. What's the gag?"

"Gag?" repeated Harg wonderingly. "Oh, yes—gag! A jest; a trick. Why, there is no—er—gag. I was merely attempting to place your position in the world line. You see, *this* is the year M-62. You would call it—" He pondered briefly. "You would call it—25,983 A.D."

"What!" Larry's fingers crept tighter about the butt of his automatic. "Hey, Sandra, let's get out of here! This guy's nuts!"

Harg smiled upon the young engineer benignly, but his hand toyed with one of the metallic studs on his harness. "I shouldn't attempt anything—er—rash, if I were you," he suggested quietly. "I believe the young lady is beginning to comprehend. Am I not right, Miss Day?"

"I—I think so," nodded the girl faintly. "Larry, this really is the two-hundred-and-sixtieth century. Harg is not fooling us. Through some incredible accident . . . or maybe by design. . . ."

Harg rubbed his wee hands together triumphantly.

"But by design!" he cried. "Oh, most assuredly by design! I brought you here! I, Harg-Ofortu! You are the results of my experiments."

"Experiments?" Larry didn't like the sound of the word. His eyes narrowed.

"Yes. The results of my experiments with the Time warp. Surely you know that Time can be warped? But, yes—of course you do. Even in your unenlightened era men had begun to recognize that fact. Still, it has taken all these intervening millenia for a human brain to unravel the problem of utilizing this knowledge. And I, Harg-Ofortu, have done it! I have brought you here, alive and unharmed, as a living proof of my genius."

"And now that we're here—" began Sandra.

Harg beamed.

"Ah, the glory that is yours! You most fortunate children of a slumbrous past. From you we shall learn many things, things to fill gaps in our history of

mankind. From your infantile brains we can extract racial memories stretching back to the early simian beginnings. From your bodies we can learn the history of man's early structure.

"You have hair! Teeth! Ears! It would not even surprise me to find that you have rudimentary gills. Maybe vermiform appendices! Oh, what marvelous subjects you will make for the dissecting table!"

Sandra's color fled; her breath hissed sharply.

"Dissecting table! But surely you can't mean to use us for—"

Harg silenced her with a tiny gesture. "Come, now. Let us waste no more time in idle chatter. We have delayed long enough, and I am afire with impatience. We will go to the laboratory."

UNTIL this morning, Larry had maintained an incredulous silence. But now, with a sudden movement, he stepped before Sandra, his automatic leveled.

"Not us, fella!" he rapped. "I'm not such a keen student of this Time business, but I know when I'm behind the little black ball numbered eight. You got us here, you say? Okay—we've had a nice visit but we don't like the climate. So we'll be toddling off now. Send us back where we belong. And—" He jiggled the gun threateningly. "And get working on it before I make you look like a second-hand punch-board."

"My dear aborigine!" laughed Harg softly. His tiny fingers sought and pressed one of his metal studs. A golden glow diffused about him, forming a radiant mesh of shimmering light about his body. "Certainly you do not think to harm *me* with your elementary weapon of destruction? Now, come, before I am compelled to use force."

"You," said Larry grimly, "asked for it!" And his finger tightened on the trigger. The automatic barked leaden death directly at Harg's breast. The little man of time yet-to-be smiled maddeningly. Before Larry's stupefied gaze, a flattened, shapeless blob of lead *splatted* against the golden haze, fell dully to the ground!

Again Larry fired. This time Harg moved slightly. The bullet glanced off the lustrous force-armor, ricocheted from the

ochre web to fly screaming into the woods beyond. Larry flung his impotent weapon away.

"Well, if that won't do it, maybe *this*—" And he stepped toward the smirking scientist, fists clenched. His arms touched the thin mist, then his heaving chest.

And, strangely, his head was aswim with an overwhelming giddiness. His limbs were numb with a creeping impotence that suffused his body, dulled his senses. The gray sky above seemed to recede far, far into the distance. There was mocking laughter in his ears, darkness gathering before his eyes. The last sound he heard as he sank, weak and helpless, into the swirling haze of unconsciousness, was the cry of Sandra Day—

"Larry!"

## II

FIRST all was blackness, then in that blackness was a spot of light that grew larger and larger and ever larger until the world was filled with roaring light. And now the dim, fluttering sounds began to make sense, and a voice was saying, "I see the young man is awakening. Good. Now we will take a little trip through my laboratories."

This was Larry Wilson's welcome to the incredible surroundings in which he found himself.

He was lying on a small pallet. Or, rather, two small pallets which had been placed end to end to accommodate his six-foot frame. Above him was a silken coverlet, beneath his head a soft pillow cased in the same material. He moved an arm experimentally and discovered that his rough, English tweed business suit was missing, as were his heavy leather brogues. While he had been unconscious, someone had replaced his Twentieth Century garments with those of Harg's era.

A soft and pliable leather harness fitted snugly about his waist—but as he stretched himself up from his cot he saw that his gear lacked the multitude of cryptic studs and instruments with which the scientist's had been decked.

Then, "Larry—you're all right?"

Sandra Day, who had leaped to her feet as Larry stirred, flew across the room. Her clothing, too, had been supplanted by

that of the later era. Her harness differed from Larry's only in the addition of a cupped breast-girdle similar to that once worn by Egyptian women. Leather, soft and white and pliant, clung closely to her slim, lithe body. As Larry looked at her, she faltered. A slow flush mantled her cheeks. Harg moved forward, a delighted gleam in his protruding eyes.

"Modesty!" he said in a tone of enchantment. "Sex shame! Imagine! And we had believed that it died out long before the Machine Era. It would be interesting to mate you two young people and—" He stroked his temple thoughtfully. "But we will think of that later. Come, my dear young savages. Let me show you my *other* experiments."

Larry's eyes, smoldering rebellion, sought those of Sandra. The girl's cheeks still flamed with a high pride, but she nodded almost imperceptibly, cautioning him to cause no immediate trouble. He grunted, "Okay, let's go. What is there to see?"

The chamber in which he had awakened was a square box of metal, lighted from above by concealed globes of cold light. No windows or doors marred the smooth luster of the walls. But as Harg stepped forward and touched his fingers to a spot on the wall briefly, a section slid back, exposing a brilliantly lighted corridor beyond.

Silently the three moved into the passage, Larry bringing up the rear. As he passed through the portal, he studied it cautiously. If he could only learn the secret of the operation of that door. . . .

"It would do you," Harg interrupted his scrutiny, "no good, of course. This is but one of many inner chambers. There are many other doors and many guards to pass. Moreover, you cannot return to your Time ever—without my help."

Larry started guiltily. The man was uncanny! He seemed to be able to read thoughts!

"Now, here—" said Harg, "are the results of some of my earlier attempts to bring life-samples through the Time warp."

They had turned a corner and entered into a long chamber walled into sections. In each section there was an animal of some sort. So lifelike were the postures of these beasts that Larry half expected a cacaphony of protest to greet their en-



trance. But the creatures were stiff, silent. Harg smiled his white-gummed, toothless smile.

"Dead," he said regretfully. "All of them. Their bodies survived the passage through the Time warp. But when they arrived, the spark had gone. We have identified most of them. But some still puzzle us."

HE pointed to the motionless figures in the cages as, one by one, they passed them. "A cow," he said, "which I brought through from the Fiftieth Century. Notice the exaggerated udders. The result of centuries of cross-breeding for milk. Somewhat different from the same beast of your day, I presume.

"This next is a pterodactyl from the Jurassic Age. I am glad to say it lived two whole weeks after coming down through the warp. The hardier animals were the only ones to survive at all—until I perfected my process. You have already seen my brontosaurus. A harmless thing. We allow it to roam freely, but we had to destroy the dinosaur that came after it. . . .

"You recognize this sabre-toothed tiger? And the kangaroo? An interesting subject, by the way. I brought it through from the year 12,000. It had reached a high stage of development and could converse in simple phrases. A far cry from man's estate, however."

"You mean," said Sandra, "it could talk?"

"Oh, yes. But then many of the lower animals *do* speak, you know. Of course I use the ancient meaning of the word. I mean they employ the vocal organs. They have not *this!*" He tapped the skull covering which both Larry and the girl had noticed before.

"That?" said Larry wonderingly. "What is it?"

But the little man was wringing his hands in exasperation. "Now, I declare!" he cried. "All this time, you have been opening and closing your mouths while we were communicating, and I thought it was caused by some physical disturbance! *You* use vocal converse, too!"

"But of course," said the girl.

"It is quite unnecessary!" snapped the scientist. "With the *menaudo*, I can understand your thoughts clearly—and com-

municate my own to you, as well. In the future, both of you will be kind enough to think without speaking!"

"Why?" asked Larry bluntly. "Miss Day and I aren't mind-reading big-brains like you. If we wish to speak to each other—"

For the first time since they had met him, Harg's ever-present smile faded. A trace of his annoying superiority, self-confidence, seeped away. In his eyes there was a groping expression oddly akin to fear.

"There is nothing you need tell her!" he ordered. "I do not care to risk my—" He stopped suddenly, cannily. When he spoke again, it was in a milder tone. "You may, if you wish, converse with your mouths when I am not present. But in my presence I require you to think your conversation."

A sudden suspicion began to form in Larry's mind. He stifled it instantly; thrust it from him lest Harg grasp that faint, half-formed thought. Hastily he changed the subject.

"This other beast—" he began aloud. Then, remembering Harg's warning, he stopped and rephrased the query in his mind. "This other strange beast," he thought. "What is it?"

He knew, then, why Harg had taunted him for his interest in the mechanism of the door. For swift as an arrow the answer formed itself in his brain.

"A phoenix," replied Harg, "of the late Stone Age. A most curious creature; half animal, half bird. Originally it was a native of the planet Mars. It adapted itself to utter cold and airlessness when that planet's atmosphere waned. A few phoenix migrated to Earth, but failed to survive in our heavy atmosphere."

"That explains," cried Sandra, "the legend of the phoenix prevalent in our day. It was believed that the bird destroyed itself in fire to rise again, reborn."

"An amusing misapprehension," nodded Harg. "No doubt it was founded on someone's having seen a phoenix pass unscathed through flame. The creature was quite immune to temperature changes. But not to disease. It was this that, finally, caused its extinction.

"Now, in this next chamber—" He paused, obviously piqued. "I must confess, we have been unable to classify this

beast. It is utterly unknown to our science. Apparently it does not breed true, nor can we determine its age—"

Larry and Sandra stared once at the quadruped in the booth, then broke into a duet of long and hearty laughter. Harg stared at them annoyedly. "Well?" he snapped. "Well?"

Larry said solemnly, "Harg, you've caught a rare beast there. There are none left in your day and age except the two-legged variety."

Harg said, "You know it, then? Its name, quickly!"

"We call it," Larry told him, grinning, "the jackass!"

THE tour of inspection completed, Harg returned his two captives to the cell they shared. When the door closed behind him, Larry turned swiftly to Sandra.

"Now what? I'm not sure I understand just what's going on around here, but whatever it is, it means trouble. Spelled with a capital 'Harg.' That little monkey didn't knock me cold with his yellow fuzz just for the hell of it. He means business."

"I'm afraid," said Sandra seriously, "he intends to do just what he said—and in just as offhand a manner as that in which he mentioned it. To probe our brains for race memories, then dissect us for biological knowledge."

"But why?" demanded Larry. "For Lord's sake, why? We're human beings, the same as he. He couldn't kill us in cold blood, just to—"

"To him," said Sandra, "we are nothing but a pair of savages. He is not being deliberately cruel, no more so than a Twentieth Century scientist who practices vivisection to add to his knowledge. He is proud of us as an acquisition. May even like us in some cold, inhuman fashion, as we like cats and dogs. But we represent a scientific problem to be solved—and there is no thought in his mind of mercy."

"Then," said Larry forcefully, "we've got to pull our freight. Get out of here. But how? That's the rub."

"We're helpless against him," mused the girl, "on all save one point. That is the subject he wanted to avoid. Hearing.

Larry—Harg can't hear! Not as we understand the word. His ears have atrophied. Or, perhaps—" A sudden light shone in her eyes. "I have it! His ears are—"

"Wait a minute!" broke in Larry excitedly. "For once I beat you to the draw. I guessed it in the museum. These jaspers of the 260th Century are not only *unable* to hear, they're *afraid* to hear! They wear those leather headgears because they have to. Because something had made them extremely sensitive to percussion."

"And I know," chimed in the girl positively, "what caused it. It was the change!"

"Change?"

"Yes. You've noticed the sky, haven't you? Didn't you see something strange about it?"

Larry thought for a moment. Then, "The sun! There isn't any sun."

"There is a sun," cried the girl, "but you can't see it. It's concealed behind a huge dome of *impervite*—a sort of leaded, polarized glass. Harg told me all about it while you were unconscious.

"In the year 17,000 A.D., or thereabouts, there was a terrible catastrophe on Earth. Man's constant drainage of electrical energy created a rupture in the Heavside layer, and the layer collapsed. As you know, the Heavside layer is Earth's only protection against potentials from space, from the undiluted strength of the Milliken rays.

**W**ITHOUT that protection, life on Earth was doomed. So large areas were domed over with this sixty-foot-thick layer of *impervite*. And—"

"And in the meantime," interrupted Larry, "intense subjection to cosmic radiation, along with the increasing use of telepathy, turned the human race's hearing apparatus from a useful organ into a vestigial one."

"And one," agreed the girl, "sensitive as the nerve of a tooth. It must be that. It couldn't be anything else. So there is Harg's weakness. Now, if we can only find some way to play upon it—"

Larry said gloomily, "But he still is the only one who can return us to our own time."

Sandra's hand touched his swiftly, confidently.

"We'll find some way to make him," she whispered. "We'll do it, you and I—"

Even under these circumstances Larry Wilson found the touch of that hand thrilling, the confidence of Sandra's voice, with its "you and I," endearing. It was a jest of the gods that this new glory should have come to him at last in such a situation. But the year mattered little. Time or no Time, he knew, and he thought she knew—

"Sandra," he said, "there is one thing—" "Shhh!" she cautioned suddenly. "Footsteps!"

The metallic doorpane slid back, and once again Harg entered the room, this time accompanied by a pair of diminutive companions garbed in plainer, cruder harshness than that of the scientist. Larry made an effort to expunge all thought from his mind, fearful that the man of the future might read his new determination. But Harg smiled easily.

"You will come with me now, Miss Day."

Instantly Larry was on the alert. "Where are you taking her?"

"It is not yours to ask, savage," said Harg curtly. "But reassure yourself. She will come to no harm."

Sandra's eyes pleaded with Larry; silently she let the attendants lead her away. After the door had closed behind them, Larry began to pace the floor angrily. His mind was tumultuous with conflicting thoughts and emotions. Damn them! he thought. If this was the world of the future, it would be better that the future never come! Anyway, he knew he wanted none of it! He wanted to be back in the good old Twentieth Century where men were men, not callous, grinning little sawed-off runts.

But—how to get there?

A SCRAPING sound from the farther wall of his cell interrupted his angry reverie. Instantly Larry was again a man of action. On silent feet he tiptoed toward the mysterious sound. The scratching persisted. Larry drew a deep breath, then pounded on the metal with his bare fist.

"Who's there?"

Immediately the noise ended. Larry waited breathlessly. Was this a trap of some kind? Or was it just some experiment of Harg's, designed to test him as laboratory students test the reaction of rats in a maze?

His footsteps deliberately loud, he stomped away from the wall. Then he stole back quietly. After a brief moment of waiting, the gentle, fumbling sound resumed. Larry pressed his ear to the metal wall. He could hear a faint noise as of someone breathing deeply. He leaned closer. . . .

Then, suddenly, the wall before him slid away, and he was catapulted forward against a flesh-and-blood body that grunted under the impact of his weight!

Larry regained his balance; came up with doubled fists. But his fists, like his mouth, dropped open abruptly as he stared in astonishment at his antagonist. This was no puny dwarfling such as he had expected. This was a *man*—a man whose stature was greater even than his own! A mighty, bronzed, strong-thewed giant with a shock of silvery-white hair capped by the *mencaudo* of the future folk!

The great one's face was etched with bitter lines of disappointment. But the look faded as his eyes swept up Larry's six foot frame, noted the breadth of shoulder and the lean, hard muscles of arm and thigh. The stranger rose, and his full lips parted in a smile of greeting.

And, "Peace, friend!" he said in a deep, resonant voice, "I, too, am a captive!"

### III

SANDRA DAY, seated in an inner chamber of Harg's laboratories, watched curiously as the little scientist busied himself with cryptic recording devices. Two assistants silently performed the tasks allotted them. Save for these three, the room was innocent of humans. Harg turned to one of the assistants.

"Where is the *mencaudo* for our subject?" he snapped.

The man stared stupidly. "In the vaults, Master. I did not know you would want one."

"Fool! You should have known. Let me have yours."

The assistant paled. "No, no, Master!

I will get another one quickly. See, I run—"

"You will not be harmed, dolt!" said Harg coldly. "You may get another for yourself immediately—but now I need one for Miss Day. Come, the *menaudo*!"

Reluctantly, fearfully, the assistant stripped the telepathic device from his hairless pate, passed it to Harg. Harg handed it to Sandra. "You will put this on. While my *menaudo* allows us to converse normally, the experiment we are about to try requires complete flux between both minds. This is only possible when each person wears the *menaudo*."

Sandra understood, now, why her innermost thoughts, her conversations with Larry, had not been intercepted. Telepathy was a matter of willed direction. Thought beams, being electrical, radiated only toward a focused object. Harg could only receive the messages she allowed him to get.

Her eyes flickered lightly over the assistant who had already started for the door. Now was the time to test her theory. She scraped one sandalled foot raspily across the rung of her chair. The noise was a tiny, grating squeak, barely audible—but the assistant's face contorted in swift agony. His eyes bulged with alarm; he clapped his hands to his ears and raced from the chamber.

"Hurry, woman!" Harg was growing impatient. Subduing her smile of triumph with an effort, Sandra buckled on the *menaudo*. As she did so, a wild giddiness assailed her; she grasped the arms of the chair for support. A powerful wave length of forces unsuspected burst through her brain. She caught the faint, amused hauteur of the assistant across the room; felt Harg's keen, scalpel-like mentality probing the depths of her mind. The giddiness passed as she became accustomed to the strange sensation. The turmoil in her brain settled, from its chaos came clear-cut order.

"You must relax now. Clear your mind of all extraneous thought. I wish to learn something of your former existences. . . ."

Strange that Harg's eyes should be so large. They were like a large light glowing deep into the dark recesses of her brain. A light that kept her awake when she was so tired . . . so tired. . . .

If she could but rest, now. Sleep for a while and let the dizzy years slip by . . . and the strange sounds . . . and the strange scenes . . . for surely this could not be she? But it was she . . . and she was standing by the open fireplace in a medieval castle, facing a knight in full battle-armor. . . . Her heart was filled with nameless anguish. . . .

"PRITHEE, lass," he was saying, "take this parting not to heart. Ere the moon wanes our work shall be at an end, the king avenged and the foul despoiler wrenched from the arms of his scuttish lady. Mordred hath said—"

"Mordred! Mordred!" she cried bitterly. "Even now it is Mordred you speak of. Yet aforetime didst thou call him a prince's brat and a lickspittle. Pray, Gawaine, my love, forswear this mad fancy and flee now to the defense of our lady Guenevere ere it be too late!"

"Nay, sweet," was his answer. "If Arthur be not shamed of his own cuckoldry, then must the Table Round avenge the pride of Britain for him. But, hark! Gareth calls. I must leave thee, love. Farewell. I return soon."

He strode from the hall, proud and straight in his armor. She wept and could not tell why. "Gawaine, my lord!" she sobbed. "There bodes in me a sense that nevermore shall we twain meet. . . ."

"Go back!" a voice was whispering in Sandra's mind. "Back farther still. To the days of the past. . . ."

\* The *daryeb* glided, soft as the wing of a moth, upon the smooth blue waters of the Nile. The golden cascade of the sun baked the *sudd* that floated on the water's surface. She raised her finger imperiously and the boatsman obediently turned the light craft to the shore.

As the Nubian reefed the sail, a young man ran down from the portal of the observatory to the edge of the beach. He grasped her hands eagerly. "Belia!" He bent and smothered a kiss in her perfumed hair. She drew away, pouting.

"Now, by Set," she swore prettily, "thou art more ardent than the bulls of Anubis—when the sun shines. But at night where art thou? In there—star-gazing!" She glanced distastefully at the massive pyra-

mid built by the Pharoah Cheops for his astronomers.

Her lover's bronzed face sobered.

"Great things betoken, lovely Belia. Things thou wouldst scarce understand." He pointed to the blinding orb that blazed above them. "Hear, now—ever has man thought that Ra drives his golden chariot about our mother Earth. But now I, silent and alone, have learned a greater truth. It is not the sun that moveth—but *we!* Ra's abode is the hub about which our tiny mote revolveth! This message have I sent, with my proofs thereof, to the great Pharoah. When he has read them, glory and fame will be my lot!"

A swift fang of fear, sharper than the sting of the scorpion, knifed her heart. Her voice was deep and low.

"You speak sacrilege, my love! What have you done? Not fame will be thy lot—but swift death! This thing cannot be so. . . ."

*"Into the years beyond," came the whispered command. "Project yourself still further backward, woman from the past. Back . . . and back . . . and back. . . ."*

Dank, steamy rain splattered on her crouched back, plastering the long, coarse hair to her naked body. A tongue of flame ripped from the thunderous vault above and the gods roared in mighty anger. She was Thaa, daughter of Gor, mate of Bab the Hungry One.

Hunkered against the farthest wall of their cave, she shivered with cold and fright as she clutched her mewling newborn to her downy breast. Ten days had the god-tears fallen, now, turning the world into a morass of water. The time of Great Cold approached, when meat was scarce and comfort scarcer. Thaa shivered.

Again the gods hurled a shaft of forked light down the skies. Bab, glowering at the cave mouth, called to her.

"Thaa! See?"

She sidled to him, forgetting her coldness in the strange sight that greeted her eyes. In the plain below was a round and shining ball. A cave stood open in the sides of the ball; from this cave issued creatures. Not men, like themselves, nor animals like Tran the Long-Toothed or Shur the Swinger. But odd creatures dressed in

silver hair that glistened. Hastily she swung behind Bab as he clambered down the side of the cliff, intent on plumbing this marvel.

**F**EARLESSLY they approached the shining ball. One of the creatures raised his voice in strange, fluent, meaningless syllables. Others of the Shining Ones came running. They raised hands in token of friendship. Bab and Thaa responded. Thaa shivered in awe as she watched the strange beings. Were they gods? she thought.

One of the visitors saw her shiver, moved forward.

"Poro methe eus?" he asked.

Thaa gazed at him dumbly; her eyes adoring. The tongue of the gods was not for mortals to know. She bowed. The young visitor turned to one of his elders.

"The creature is cold, but knows not that I have asked her so. What shall I do?"

The elder nodded sadly.

"What matters it? Let them live or die, sad brutes, as you think best. When I consider the waste, the futility, of our tedious voyage across the emptiness of space to find *these* as our neighbors—" He sighed.

"Yet some day," mused the younger one, "may evolve from these beasts men like ourselves. Who knows? Our world is older than theirs, and wiser. Yet even now our planet is dying. By the time they have become intelligent enough to return this visit, we may be dead, our civilization ended.

"Poor brutes! I am minded to show them kindness. They should live. We can give them at least one comfort—"

From his pocket he drew a glittering toy, as Thaa watched he pressed it. A ruddy, wavering tongue licked from its mouth. "Poro methe eus?" he repeated gently. He handed the tiny cylinder to Bab. Bab's clumsy fingers fumbled with the button, once more the tongue of fire leaped forth. Bab dropped the bauble, howling, and scampered for the refuge of his cave.

But Thaa retrieved the little gift. She too pressed the release, and a pleasure-look passed over her features. Here was warmth! Here was a god-gift against the time of the Great Cold. With this to protect them, their cave would be always comfortable. She raised her eyes gratefully.

"Por—pro—" Her brute tongue mouthed the god-words awkwardly. "Pro—neth—eus—"

*"Back . . . back . . ." whispered the insistent command. "Back farther still. To the very dawn of life. . ."*

*She heard the voice but could not obey. Her mind was a vast sea of swirling blackness, her senses shrieked in rebellion against intolerable pain. "Back—" Mad pictures imaged on her brain, fled howling. There was one brilliant burst of coruscating light—then darkness and peace.*

Harg-Ofortu frowned impatiently, fingered his subject's pulse, and snapped off a switch. He motioned to his assistant. "The woman," he said, "has fainted. Take her away. We will continue our experiments later."

WHEN Sandra awakened at last, it was to find Larry bending over her, chafing her wrists, looking down into her eyes anxiously. There was a lingering warmth on her lips; short seconds ago might have found his face even closer to hers. He sighed with relief as her eyes opened. The sigh became an oath.

"Damn his rotten little hide! I thought you were out for keeps. What did he do, Sandy? Are you all right?"

She was all right. A little rocky. She discovered that when she tried to rise and her head ached wickedly. But she was all right. She told him her memories of the experiment. "It was like a horrible dream, Larry. But it was more than a dream. It was true. I have lived those scenes before . . . somewhere . . . sometime. They were so clear, so vivid." She shuddered. "But I hate to think of going through that again. I won't be able to stand it. I could feel my brain tottering on the brink of insanity toward the end."

Larry said savagely, "You won't have to go through it again!"

Sandra touched his hand, smiling wanly. "It's no use pretending, Larry. We're caught in a trap, you and I. Fate has destroyed us; thrust us forward into a Time when man is without mercy. Humanity is dead. All that remains is a race of grinning, scientific demons."

"That," interrupted Larry feverishly, "is

where you're wrong, youngster! I haven't been sitting around twiddling my thumbs while you were gone. I've had a visitor."

"A—a visitor?"

Larry told her, then, of the silver-haired giant who had forced entrance into the cell. "His name was Sert. He was a man and a friend. He was one of the Underlings."

"The Underlings?" repeated Sandra.

"Yes. This world we are in is not peopled only by cold-blooded creatures like Harg. There are two mutant races of humanity. One tall and strong, as we always dreamed the future-man might be; the other spindling, puny, and viciously intelligent.

"These latter, Harg and his fellows, are the descendants of those men whose brains, for some reason more receptive to the stimulus of ultra-short wave radiation, were spurred to great heights during the period of the Great Catastrophe.

"The cosmic bombardment had three types of result. Either it killed outright—and Sert tells me that millions died—or it damaged the brain and did not harm the body, or it impaired the physique and stimulated the brain. During the era of chaos which preceded the building of the *impervite* domes, the highly activated dwarfs seized the reins of leadership. They have held them ever since. The Underlings are their workers, their slaves, their servants."

Sandra said despairingly, "But I don't see how it can profit us to join forces with dull-witted slaves—"

"Slaves, yes! But they are dull-witted no longer. Generations have erased the madness from the Underlings' brains. The Masters hold them in subjection now only because they have superior armament. The golden force-ray, for one thing.

"But rebellion is stirring amongst the Underlings. Sert is one of the leaders of a secret rebel party. He was stealing through the building, seeking new converts, when he accidentally entered our cell."

Some of Larry's excitement communicated itself to the girl. She said, "But what are we going to do?"

"Sert," Larry told her, "taught me how to open the doors around this joint. It's not hard when you get the hang of it. Every wall has a door-lock. The locks work on a network of selenium cells imbedded in the metal; these are controlled

automatically by body-radiation emanating from the fingertips. Ever hear of anything like that before?"

Sandra said dazedly, "Mitogenic radiation!"

"Yes. That's what Sert called it, too. Well, all you have to do is discover the proper way to touch the doors. The right combination and bingo! If your fingers are sensitive, you can do it without much fumbling. I learned easily."

"You still haven't told me what we're going to—"

"We're pulling out of this coop—tonight! In the machine shops, Sert has a gang of a half hundred rebels. We will join them."

"And then?"

"Then," said Larry tightly, "we'll figure out some way to clean out this rat's nest. We're going to give Earth back to the Men again. And I do mean 'men!'"

#### IV

LARRY WILSON tossed a grin over his shoulder to the girl behind him. His fingers moved swiftly, deftly, twisting into strange, unnatural angles as he sought the combination that would open the smooth wall before him.

"Some fun, hey?"

Sandra said anxiously, "How much farther, Larry?"

"We're almost there now. Sert told me there were nine chambers between the one we were in and the machine room. They're all supposed to be unoccupied, too."

"But—if they're not?"

"Then our plans go up the creek. But Sert wouldn't be likely to make a mistake. He has more at stake than we— Ah! There she blows!"

Larry's fingers had finally moved into the right combination. The smooth wall slid back. The pair from the past moved into the next room of the labyrinth of the future. The door closed behind them, and Larry moved immediately to the wall fronting them.

"One more small chamber, and then—"

He stopped, shocked and alarmed. For just as his hand touched the wall, it moved backward and a figure loomed before him. Sandra screamed a little scream of fright. To be so near success, and then—

But the voice that spoke was that of a friend.

"Ah, Larry Wilson! You were long in coming. So I came to find you. But, come! Our council awaits you."

The three entered, then, the final and largest of the chambers. During the working hours of the day it was a machine shop in which Underlings toiled under the harsh supervision of their Master overseers. Now it was deserted save for rather more than twoscore conspirators similar in physique and coloring to the leader, Sert.

Introductions were a brief formality. It was evident that some of the Underlings could not comprehend the anomaly of Sandra and Larry's presence. But what these rebel serfs lacked in intellect they made up for in their lust for freedom. And the two young Americans, hailing from a land that, in its time, had been the bulwark of this precious inheritance, felt a kinship with the suppressed uprisers.

At length Sert said, "—so that is as far as our plans have gone, Larry Wilson. You see how pitifully inadequate they are.

"Not only do the Masters outnumber us, but theirs is the possession of the golden force-ray which no armament can pierce. None, that is, of the feeble type we own. The force of our greater strength . . . tools converted into crude swords. . . ."

He looked hopelessly at the massive machinery surrounding them. "Could we but find a way to destroy their protective force-field, we would tear these machines into bits to mold weapons for ourselves. But we cannot."

Larry said, "I've been thinking about that problem. And I've got an idea that may or may not work. Sert, it is only the Masters whose ears are sensitive to sound, isn't it? There's nothing wrong with your hearing?"

"That is right, Larry Wilson."

"Then sound—" began Larry.

Sert shook his head. "Do you forget the *menaudo*, my friends? The Masters wear it at all times. It blocks out the sound waves that would torture them, drive them mad."

"I haven't forgotten it," grunted Larry. "I'm trying to think of a way to pour sound over 'em without making 'em remove the football helmet. And I think I know how to do it. Strangely enough,

you have to make them turn on the golden force-ray before it will work!"

"I don't understand," said Sert. Others edged in curiously as Larry explained.

"When the force ray surrounds them," he explained, "their bodies become, in effect, a helical core. Such a core can be made responsive to musical tones by what, in my day, we called C.E.M.F.—counter electromotive force. I suppose you know the method of manufacture of the force ray?"

"Not the details. But the purely mechanical part, yes. We wind the relays in this shop—"

"Then," said Larry crisply, "you've got 'em licked! We'll get to work—*now!*—and build an electrical resonator. One that shoots out plenty of noise on the wave length to which their force-fields are attuned. When this howler gets going, the force-field will act as a conductor, leading the sound directly into their bodies!"

Sert's face broke in a huge grin. "And if they turn off the force-field—" he howled.

"Right! You work out on them with whatever you can lay your hands on." Larry was suddenly all work. "Give me one or two technicians and I'll rig up the electrical siren in jig-time. The rest of you start gathering weapons. This rebellion lasts the minute they find out what we're cooking up!"

**T**HUS, for the next couple of hours, the room became once more a place of strenuous labor—but this time there was gladness and will in the way the Underling rebels went to work. With ruthless disregard for assigned uses, they tore apart a brace of mighty machines. Belows sighed, lathes screamed, as rods, bars, balanced shafts became blunt-edged swords, lances and maces.

Meanwhile, in one corner, Larry Wilson cudged his brain to remember almost forgotten college physics. Finally his task was done. Before him lay a box some two feet square; within it were two tubes, a slide condenser, and an armature turning on a "howler" disc, pierced with circles of varying diameter. Larry lugged the contraption to Sert's side and crossed his fingers.

"Here it is," he said. "Salvation or the

bum's rush in one small package. It'll work as a radio, I know that, but I'm not sure it will pull the trick against the force-field. I've rigged a rheostat control which gives a certain choice of wave-lengths. But if the field blocks 'em all out—"

He shook his head ruefully. But Sert laid a hand on his shoulder. "It will work, my friend," he said. "It will work because—it must! And, now—" He turned to the others gathered about him. "And, now we will strike! For freedom!"

Larry turned to Sandra Day. "This," he said, "is going to be no place for you, darling. Not in a few minutes. So grab yourself a box-seat in the background somewhere and after the fireworks are over I'll—"

The girl said, "L-Larry—what did you say?"

"Beat it. Over in one of the other chambers—"

"No. I mean before that. You called me—" She flushed. That was one thing, Larry discovered, about these clothes of the future. A flush was a real flush, no halfway thing. It started from—

He said, suddenly gentle, "I called you 'darling.' Do you mind—darling?"

"I think," she replied softly, "it's the prettiest word I ever heard." Then she applied that fine feminine attribute for which there is no allowance in man's equations; a woman's logic. "But it is *not* the word to make me get out of here. I stay, Larry. Beside you—where I belong."

Larry protested, "Now, look here, Sandy—"

She merely smiled sweetly. "How," she asked, "do you operate this gadget? I might need to know, later on."

Larry gave up. Grinning, he showed her.

The other Underlings knew their parts in the short play soon to be enacted. It was a play with a simple plot. It required two stooges; two who, daring swift annihilation, would go forth into the frequented parts of the giant building of which this laboratory was but a section, beard the Masters in their dens, and bring them down to this place.

Already such a pair had been selected from the number—the full fifty, it had warmed Larry's heart to notice—whc had volunteered. The rest of the men were





there was death anyway. Hideous and mind-blasting death from Larry's screaming box.

Reinforcements came, stared once into the bloody chamber of rebellion—and fled, hands clutching their ears. A few scattered remnants of the first retribution party managed to escape the debacle. And finally there came a moment when there were no Masters left alive in the room. The battle was over—and the Underlings had won!

**T**HEN came Sert to Larry once again, and there was mingled joy and sadness on his face as he held out his hand to the Earthman from long ago.

"The field is ours, Larry Wilson. And it is you who made it so."

Larry said, "Mmm," absently, and turned off the now useless howler. He looked about the room. "How many men did we lose, Sert?"

"Nine dead," replied his friend, "a few injured—but all before you found their force-field's wave-length. A glorious victory, even at such a cost. In the years to come the names of those who died here tonight will be worshipped by a race of free men who were once Underlings."

Larry, brooding thoughtfully, brushed off his final words. "Skip the flag-waving, pal. You sound like a politician back home. This scrap's not over by a damn sight. I think you underestimate the Masters."

Sert said proudly, "And you underestimate our people, Larry Wilson. The news of this battle will spread, and before the next work-period thousands will flock to our standard. We will build more sonic machines, perhaps portable ones, and—"

"Sure. And what are the Masters going to be doing while all this goes on? I'll give even money that right now they're herding in the Underlings from other parts of this city for a little wholesale slaughter. It is a city, isn't it?"

"Yes. One large city-state under a single *impervite* dome operated from a control chamber."

"Operated?" repeated Larry.

"But, certainly. It can be opened for fresh air to be admitted, or for the egress and entrance of aircraft—"

"Larry!" It was Sandra who interrupted. "There's our answer, Larry. Life is impossible without the protection of the dome.

Whoever possesses the dome control chamber holds the whip hand. We must take that!"

Sert's face brightened. "She is right, Larry Wilson. We must take the dome chamber—"

"Wait a minute!" Larry had been thinking swiftly. "Sandy's got something there. But there are angles. First of all, we've got to seize the control chamber, yes. But we also need more men. If we don't get reserve strength—and good, strong fighting men, at that—sooner or later they'll starve us and our little rebellion right out of our cubby-holes.

"Right now the odds are temporarily balanced. We have fewer men, but our men are more powerful. Theirs are the best weapons, but our single weapon makes theirs useless. They control the dome—a point in their favor. But we are fighting for life and freedom—a point in ours.

"So it's a stalemate. And one that will turn into defeat for us unless we move swiftly. Before they recognize our pitiful weakness." He gazed sharply at Sandra. "Sert is needed here, to rally recruits. So it's up to you and me to get control of the dome chamber. I see one way to win. It's a dangerous way, but—"

And he told them. When he had finished speaking, there was a heavy flush on Sert's forehead. He cried, "But no, Larry Wilson! I will not let you and this girl bear the burden of my oppressed race. We must find another way."

"There is," Larry told him, "no other way. Sandy?"

The girl placed her hand in his. "It is the only way, Larry," she said. "Darling," she added—and smiled.

## V

**I**T took but a short time to make their final preparations. Larry taught a half dozen Underlings how to operate his howler, also taught them how to build others like it.

"Now get to work," he told them grimly. "Make as many of these gadgets as you can. And make 'em light and small, portable, so you can carry them around with you."

He turned to Sert. "Well, this is it, pal. Keep your eye peeled for the signal. 'One

if by land and two if by sea."

Sert said puzzledly, "What's that?"

"Skip it. What I mean is, watch the dome. If you smell something funny, that'll be fresh air, and it'll mean Sandy and I have taken the fort. Attack then. We'll be in a position to crack a whip over the runts." He held out his hand. "Be secin' you, guy! Let's go, Sandy."

Together they made their way through the labyrinth of chambers to their own cell. This time Larry fumbled less with the mitogenic locks that barred their progress; it took them but a few minutes to make the journey.

Yet even at that they barely returned in time. As they came through the chambers, Larry reminded Sandra, "We're banking on the fact that Harg doesn't know we've been out of our coop. That's our story and we're stuck with it. If by any chance he or a guard happened in while we were out, we're sunk, but—"

"It's a chance worth taking," nodded the girl.

"Yes. The big idea is to get to that control chamber. I think we can do it because Harg, big-shot as he may be, has one bad failing. Human vanity. So remember, play up to whatever I say."

"Okay, boss!" said Sandra meekly. But there was a crinkle of laughter in her eyes.

Then they were back in their own cell, the door behind them was sliding closed—and almost immediately the one before them was sliding open to admit Harg-Ofortu and a brace of armed guards!

There was fretfulness on the little scientist's face, fretfulness that turned to swift suspicion as Larry and Sandra started guiltily. His eyes swept the room, returned to Larry. Larry felt the raw demand of Harg's first directed thought, "Can these two—?" then he felt the tenuous fingers of Harg's probing mentality seeking information from his mind. With an effort he forced himself to think of simple, unimportant things. He concentrated on the tag end of an old nonsense rhyme—

"Oh, do I is? And am I be?

Or couldn't I have used to be?

Oh, cruel fate, which was to me;

I used to ain't!"

—and chuckled inwardly to catch the shocked repercussion of Harg's amazed,

"Incredible! These barbarians are simple minded children!" Then Harg spoke. Or directed a thought to the Twentieth Century couple, his equivalent of speech.

"You will come with me!"

Larry pretended alarm. "Why? We are comfortable here. We don't want to—"

"I am doing," Harg advised him crisply, "that which is best for you. There has been a little—er—disturbance in the city. I am removing you to safer quarters. I will not have my experiments upset by—"

"By—?" prodded Larry.

"That is not your concern. Come!"

**H**ARG led the way through the corridors. Larry and Sandra followed docilely. With suspicious alacrity, had the little man but known it. As they walked, Larry deliberately made his thoughts clear that Harg might interpret them. "He can't be anyone important around here. He's just one of the small fry. Obviously, he isn't very intelligent—"

Harg heard—he could not help but hear. And he understood. He could not help but understand. His wizened cheeks gained an unexpected color. He turned to Larry angrily.

"It might interest you to learn, my dear savage," he snapped, "that your thoughts are crystal clear to me. I take it you doubt my importance?"

Larry made a good job of looking embarrassed. So Sandra might know what was going on he mumbled aloud, "Well, I just couldn't help thinking—I mean, I figured you aren't really the big man around these parts. All this talk about a Time warp machine, and all—"

Harg said crisply, "Then you don't believe there is such a thing? Well, you err, barbarian. There is. And it was the genius of Harg-Ofortu that constructed it. I—"

Here Sandra stepped in with a word to Larry.

"It's all nonsense, Larry. Don't believe a word he says. He's done nothing but lie since we've met him. He told me the most impossible tale about a 'dome' and a 'dome control chamber.' Of course such things are absurd!"

"So!" Harg's thought had the crackle of audible sound. "Know, then, my two young innocents, that you choose to mock genius. Genius never lies. Behold!" He

turned abruptly from the course they were traveling, led them down a side corridor, fingered open a door and showed them, glistening across a wide expanse of metal flooring, a turret-like structure from which emanated, like the sprawling arms of an octopus, vast cables. From the hemispherical roof of this turret emanated a wide, unwavering cone of light, blinding in its brilliance.

"Behold," mocked Harg, "the dome control chamber in which you presumed to disbelieve. From this heart emanates the life of our city-state—and I am its sole supervisor. Even so, it is a tiny thing compared with the greater invention which was, and is, my own. The Time-warp machine. You still doubt? Let me show you, that you may marvel at the brain of Harg—About, guards! We return to the laboratory!"

One of the guards blinked the thick soft lids of his bulging eyes, said nervously, "But, Master of Masters—"

"We return, I said!" Harg was icy cold, even more nettled because a guard had dared question his decision, determined to exact admiration from his audience.

They turned about, began to retrace their steps. Larry marked carefully the corridor which led to the control turret. He would not forget it, nor how to reach it. And as they walked he caught Sandra's eye for a brief moment. Harg did not see the swift wink that passed between them, nor the way Sandra's hands clenched before her in a delighted gesture of approbation. . . .

But he did see, and gloried in, the amazement mirrored in the eyes of Sandra and Larry when at last they stepped into the chamber which housed the Time-warping machine. It was a huge structure, its inner chamber alone being large enough to house a battalion of men. But its core was small, being an oddly shaped, angular object spinning endlessly on a bar of crystalline material.

Displaying all the vanity Larry had hoped for, the little scientist pointed to the twirling object first, then at a great, banked keyboard like that of some gigantic organ.

"The end product of man's genius," he boasted vaingloriously, "for a thousand millenia! The machine which can span Time. You do not comprehend the object which spins upon the bar, no? I fear it

is beyond your puny concept, friends from an unenlightened age. It is a tesseract; the infinite cube of four dimensions. Your eyes see but a cross section of its fullness, which is beyond seeing. Yet I, Harg-Ofortu, conceived and built it!

"THESE banks control the ages that Have-Been and the ages that are Yet-to-Be. Through their relays are disrupted the world-line of any given thing at any given time. I would demonstrate, but terrific power is expended each time I bring a new object from the past; I would not now waste power to convince such savages as you.

"Yet by pressing a button—so—and deflecting a lever—so!—I can, if I will, bring across the negation or Time-that-Was-Not creatures like yourselves from any period of time. The ages in which I angle are clearly marked here; the position on this sphere called 'Earth' from which I draw my experiments I determine by means of this mapped globe."

He paused, smirking with pride, so blinded with self-glory that he did not even notice the studiousness of Sandra's and Larry's eyes. But when he spoke again, it was to say words that dragged Larry back to earth with a start.

"And it will interest you to know, Sandra Day, that a great tribute is shortly to be paid to you."

Sandra said, "A—a tribute?"

A faint shadow flickered across the diminutive one's face. "A recent disturbance," he proclaimed, "amongst slaves whom we call the 'Underlings' has wakened in us, the Masters, recognition that for too many generations we have allowed our brains to expand whilst our bodies failed in strength.

"We now find this to be an unworthy situation. We have decided to once again become a prolific race—but in so doing we are going to breed in such a way that our children will retain our keen intellects and the perfect bodies of men from the past. After some thought on the matter, and with an enticing example to help solve the question—" Here he fastened a greedily appreciative eye on Sandra. "—we have decided that we shall draw the mothers of our new race from *your* period!"

Sandra gasped.

"But—but you can't do that! They won't want to leave their own age, mate with strangers—"

"What," demanded Harg icily, "are the petty desires of barbarians to the Masters of Earth? Yes, my charming aborigine, soon you will have companionship with many women from your own Time. It will be pleasant company for you, I know." He paused. Then, in an expectant tone, "You may express your thanks, if you wish."

Sandra was speechless. But the words made a sort of sense to Larry; the kind of sense he did not care for. In a grating voice he demanded, "Thanks? Thanks for what?"

The little scientist smiled serenely, arching his brows.

"Because now," he answered, "she will not become a subject for the dissecting table. Her life will be spared. Yet an even greater glory is in store for her. She will not be mated to one of the lesser Masters. She will become the first and favored mate of myself, the great Harg-Ofortu!"

FOR a moment, a vast and terrible rage shook Larry Wilson. Then it evaporated, dissipated before another emotion. His fists unclenched, the frown that had sprung to his brow disappeared in a network of crinkles, and laughter bellowed from his throat, shook him, exhausted him, doubled him.

Sandra laughed, too, hysterically at first, then as completely giving way to amusement as Larry. Harg looked at first one, then the other. He was alternately surprised and startled; then, as the full import of their laughter burst upon him, he became a diminutive phial of wrath.

His goitrous eyes flamed with bitterness, his tiny body stiffened, and his hands jerked toward the studs on his harness. His thought, a maelstrom of vitriolic hatred, became a seething hell that stifled the young couple's mirth.

"You are amused? That is interesting. Perhaps you will be the less so when you lie upon the table beneath the scalpel, screaming, pleading for the boon of death I can give or withhold!" Harg's mouth was twisting with venom. "When that moment comes, O fool, remember that as

your life ebbs new life will spring within this woman— Well, what is it?"

He turned and shot the final query to the pair of guards who had appeared in the doorway. The foremost stepped forward, dragging into view a pair of manacled Underlings.

"We found these two rebels skulking about the laboratory, Master. We brought them that you might put them to the question."

"Take them away!" fumed Harg. "I have no time for them now. Destroy them as a lesson to all rebels."

"But, Master, they may know—"

Harg, thoroughly enraged now, stamped his foot in sheer spite. "Destroy them, I told you! Cast them outside the dome!"

Larry and Sandra looked at each other in swift relief. They had seen, if Harg had not, the quick recognition in the captives' eyes as they entered the room; had feared that under the questioning their part in the rebellion would be learned. Then all, indeed, would have been in vain. It was unfortunate that two Underlings must die, but it was better that two should perish than that a plan should fail.

"Well, get along!" Harg told the guards. "Throw them through the Ground Gate— No, wait a minute!" He glared malevolently at Larry. "Take this savage with you; let him behold the agony of their destruction. It will teach him that one does not safely taunt Harg-Ofortu! The woman stays with me."

Sandra's glance stayed Larry's movement. Her lips moved silently but he caught their message. He allowed the guards to lead him, with the two captives, out of the room and down one of the interminable passages of the labyrinth.

Even here he continued to count turnings, memorize passages, so that he might know his way back to the laboratory and— more important still—to the dome control turret. They walked in silence, coming at last to the huge, doubly barred and intricately locked door which was deepset in the *impervite* perimeter of the Dome.

Here, for the first time, the proud hauteur of the captive Underlings broke. Until this time they had maintained their courage; now, as one guard disengaged the locks, a glazed look of fear crept into their eyes. The great door swung open, a ten-

drill of outside air, chill and thin as hoar frost, stirred the fusty atmosphere of the labyrinth. And one of the captives cried out desperately, fell to his knees groveling, pleading, pawing at the guard's spindling shanks with futile hands.

"Down, slave!" came the guard's contemptuous command. But it was not his words that salvaged the blubbing Underling. It was the other Underling who stepped to his comrade's side, laid a firm hand on his shoulder. And—

"Come, Borl!" he said quietly. "Let us die as men should die—that our Cause may live!"

**B**ENEATH his touch the other calmed. The febrile terror left his eyes and something new glistened there. He rose, nodded, straightened his shoulders. Then proudly, almost triumphantly, the two exiles strode into the tunneled path to death. They turned there, boldly, and their voices joined in a single cry, "For freedom!"

Then the door clanged shut, and through the adjacent *impervite* transparency Larry Wilson saw two staunch figures march boldly down the tunnel to the barren world beyond.

Beside him one of the guards commented wonderingly to the other, "Remarkable! They are the first I ever saw go through the Ground Gate so gallantly—to death."

Larry asked, "But is it death? The outside atmosphere surrounded them the moment they stepped through the gate. Yet they walked away."

The guard answered tauntingly, "It is death. Make no mistake about that. The ancient archives will tell you that. It was Outside that our ancestors died. No man has yet returned who dared venture beyond the Gate." He stirred himself. "Now let us return this one to the Master Scientist and be about our work. The Underlings still—"

Then Larry stumbled. And as he did so one swiftly outthrust hand caught in the harness of the nearest guard, tugged, ripped. The studded belt snapped at the catch, flew halfway across the corridor.

The man scrambled after it, alarmed. But even as he took his first step, Larry wheeled and threw one hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle at his companion's face. Puny jawbones splintered,

blood spurted, and the guard went down as if pole-axed. Momentum swept Larry over his prostrate body to the weaponless guard; his fist raised and fell once—and that was all!

He rose, stripped both hairless pates of their precious *menaudos*, slung both studded belts over his shoulder. Armed now, he oriented himself and set off at top speed for the control turret.

Only once was his progress threatened; then but for an instant. The single Master who met him racing down a side corridor had neither time to give alarm, draw his heat-ray pistol, or snap on his force-shield. Larry's reflexes worked at lightning speed, and this was no time for stupid mercy. He sheared a crisp and smoking hole in the Master's breast with a single blast of his gun and sped on toward his goal.

That moment while his fingers sought the mitogenic combination of the turret lock was the longest he had ever lived through. It turned out to be the most elaborate he had yet encountered; ultimately operated on the placement of the fingers of both hands. While he sought the responsive chord he was dangerously exposed to any who might come near.

But Fate, for once, rolled him a natural. He broke into the control turret, stared once wildly, bewilderedly, at the dazzling array of levers and studs therein, then tugged desperately at that which seemed largest, most impressive. . . .

Then sprang to the still open doorway and looked at the leaden-gray roof of *impervites* above him. And as he looked, a great quartered section of the roof slid back, disclosing a bright blue sky in which the sun rode, gold and dazzling!

## VI

**B**UT only for an instant did he leave open that vent to the treacherous skies above. Harg and Sert had said—nor was there any reason to disbelieve them—that horrible death poured from the heavens in this later age, in the form of intense cosmic radiation. It would be a hollow victory to save a race and destroy a world.

He let the vent remain open but a few seconds, knowing that Sert's army, scattered and ready now, in a thousand secret

nooks throughout the domed city-state, would see the signal, know that the dome turret was in friendly hands, and attack the Masters.

And he was right. Even as the *imper-vite* section slid back into its accustomed position he heard the Underling siren sound from one distant corridor—then another sounded, and another, and another, until from every weaving tunnel of the labyrinth that was this future city Larry heard the ear-splitting tumult that was madness and death to the Masters.

Then a small company of Underlings burst from one tunnel. Larry leaped from the turret, grasped the leader, thrust him into the control room and shouted, "Guard this! I have a little job to take care of!"

Jaw set, eyes hard, he was off toward the laboratory where—if the gods were good to him—he would find the girl he loved and the miserable parody of a man whom he most certainly did not love.

As he ran, his footsteps followed the tempo of an ever-increasing volume of sound. Never before, he thought, since the creation of the world had begun in the high celestial music of the spheres, had mankind ever fought a life-and-death battle with such an accompaniment.

All about him—it seemed from every corridor, out of each vibrant metal wall, through every air duct that fed the gigantic new world labyrinth—came the hideous howling of the electrosonic intensifiers which had been his invention.

His trip was not a short one, and as he sped toward the laboratory he saw many men, both friends and antagonists. The Underlings, straight-shouldered with a confidence born of the up-reaching hope for liberty, were moving ever onward and onward against the foes. Armed with lances, crude swords, whatever tools and instruments they could lay hands on, they were pouring from the recesses of the city-state to charge upon the heart of the city, where dwelt the Masters.

And in the van of each group was one Underling who carried as his weapon a small, square box in which a whirling disc made music of madness.

Larry saw no pitched battles. This was a strange warfare; one in which the Masters possessed superior armaments—but could not use them. Time and again a lone

Master would break from some cubicle to face, for a moment, the advancing host of erstwhile slaves. For seconds his heat-ray gun would pour scorching death into their fore, blasting into blackened hulks those who led.

But ever and again the Master, snapping on his golden force-field as protection against the meaner weapons of the Underlings, would fall prey to the ear-bursting delirium of the howler; would stagger, would scream and reach for his *menaudo*, would die in a mist of shrieking madness.

And then, suddenly, Larry was near his goal, and from a side corridor a familiar figure was racing toward him. It was Sert, and the Underling chieftain's face was radiant with joy.

"You have succeeded, Larry Wilson! Soon the day will be ours!"

Larry shouted, "You're driving them back, Sert—but to where? They're not standing and fighting."

"No. They'll concentrate at the central plaza. But our number is growing each minute. Come with us and be in at the death—"

Larry shook his head.

"This," he said, nodding toward the laboratory now in sight, "is where I get off. I've got a private score to settle with a grinning little ape named Harg. Give 'em hell, fella! See you later!"

And alone he burst into the room in which, a short time before, he had left Harg and Sandra.

SANDRA was there, and in the excitement of the moment it did not seem strange to Larry that at the sight of her she should spring forward to throw her arms about him, drawing his face down to hers; nor did it seem strange that his lips should find hers of their own volition. He knew, now, that since first they had met on the grassy plain that outskirted the ultra-world city-state this was inevitable.

Then harsher thoughts dominated him. There was a man's task yet to be accomplished. He drew away from her, demanded, "Harg! Where is he?"

Sandra's face clouded.

"Gone to rally the Masters to a defense. News of the Underling advance came to us here. He alone knew a way to combat—"

Larry laughed grimly. "There is no way. The sonic amplifier is killing the Masters off like flies. Sert's men will soon hold the city."

"But Harg," the girl cried, "has issued orders that all Masters must turn off their force-fields. He guessed the secret of the sonic weapon. With no force-field to act as a conductor, our sound-weapons will be useless. The Masters are gathering in the central plaza. From there they plan to ray into extinction all Underlings who venture near them—at distance too great for hand-to-hand conflict!"

"And they outnumber the Underlings!" This was bad news. Larry saw, now, the one factor that would spell defeat to his friends. There were too many Masters. By holding the Underlings at a distance, destroying them with heat-rays, not permitting a close attack—

"But there is another way, Larry!" Sandra was crying. "I thought of it after Harg left. And—I have already set the machine into operation."

Larry cried desperately, "I don't know what you're talking about, Sandy. There is no other way. We're licked, and only because they outnumber us. I must find Sert, tell him to sound the retreat before all are killed—" He turned, sped for the doorway. Sandra's voice followed him.

"But, Larry, all will be well! I'm—"

"Later!" he shouted back. Then once again he was racing through the tortuous corridors of the domed metropolis. He caught up to Sert's little band on the very edge of the spacious clearing which was the central plaza of the city. That circular area must have been a full mile in diameter, into it fed literally hundreds of corridors. This was the heart of the future-city; the main aorta which fed to the smaller outlying sections.

"Sert!" Larry's cry stopped the Underling leader's upraised arm from falling. "Sert, do not lead an advance!"

Sert turned, wondering.

"But why not, Larry Wilson? See, they huddle in the center of their doomed city like kine awaiting the knife. In a few minutes the city will be ours."

"Look again! Do you see their force-shields? No. They've turned them off. They're waiting there for you to attack. If you do— Good Lord!"

Larry stopped, horrified. For as he spoke a group of exuberant Underlings burst from a tunnel at the other end of the plaza, charged, three dozen strong, down upon the huddled, waiting group of Masters in the center. Their electrosonic machine was shrieking its high note and the Underlings raced forward confidently, expecting to see the dwarfings cringe and fall before the blasts of that potent weapon.

But instead, from the ranks of the Masters came a withering blast of white radiation. The concentrated fury of a thousand heat-ray handguns. There was a brief puff of smoke, the abbreviated scream of agony from Underling throats—then silence! A small untidy heap of charred refuse dotted the spot where gallant men had died instantly.

Sert's face paled. In a shaken voice he said, "It is again a stalemate, Larry Wilson! We lack the manpower to storm that central group."

Larry said hollowly, "Not a stalemate, Sert. Taps! They've beaten us by the oldest of warfare's means—superior numbers."

"You see no hope?"

"I see," Larry shook his head sorrowfully, "no—"

**T**HEN, where a temporary awed silence had fallen over the Underlings, there arose a mighty shout that shook the dome overhead! There came strange sounds, the clash of metal upon metal, the sharp bark of musketry, the clatter of shod hoofs, bellowsings and trumpeting Larry could not begin to guess the reason for. Stranger still, the sound of crying bugles—and grating commands in tongues harsh and foreign!

And from the corridors to right and left, main arteries of the plaza, spewed an amazing host!

In the fore were a horde of short, dark men garbed in leathern kirtles, with great golden greaves glittering on swart and hairy calves, with burnished shields before them, with broad-swords raised in brandishment as they plunged toward the startled central knot of Masters.

And immediately behind these came, trumpeting and thundrous-hoofed, a dozen elephants in war-trappings of Byzantine splendor! At express-train speed the



pachyderms lumbered down upon the shrinking knot before them.

From another corridor spilled yet another incredible host. Four score of men, bearded and moustached, gay-uniformed in the blue and crimson of the *francs-tireurs*, the bitter guerrilla invaders who struck terror into Prussia in 1870. Horse-mounted were these, and their mounts' nostrils quivered with the ancient lust for battle as they hurtled ever forward.

In an endless stream, then, came the man-power that alone could win this battle! And never a stranger host had taken a single field. Here, on swift, hairy ponies, rode a handful of wild-eyed Huns clad in ragged furs. There, from another corridor, burst a clanking foot-legion that rallied beneath the banner of Darius. Behind these, pressing to get through and into the thick of the fray, came a troop of butternut-uniformed musketeers beneath a barred and starred red banner. Their rebel yell sounded shrill and deadly above the tumult.

Sert's face was blank with astonishment, but his fighting heart knew but one thing. That here, by a miracle, were the reinforcements he needed. With a great cry, "For freedom!" he raised his arm—and from their separate tunnels broke forth the Underlings to do battle, shoulder to shoulder, with those who fought their cause!

Not easily was that cause won. After their first instant of shock, the Masters raised their weapons against the diverse foe. Flaming death answered the barks of muskets, colored rays of potency unspeakable poured destruction into the close-packed ranks of those who stormed the plaza.

But here were a hundred legions, all trained to war and inured to the fact of impending death. Where one man fell another took his place. Spears, arrows, even flaming projectiles filled the air. From somewhere came the biting chatter of a Gatling gun, pouring its slow racket of death into the ranks of the dwarflings.

Force-fields went on—and Masters died as the Underlings' sonic torture burst their brains. Force-fields went off—and Masters died beneath barbaric weapons from ages long forgotten. The metal floor ran red with blood, blood was grit when mingled with charred ashes that had been men.

There could be but one result. It came at last when a cowering Master leader threw both arms skyward, pleading a truce, acknowledging a defeat!

LARRY found himself in the front rank of the attackers. How he had gained that spot he did not know, nor did he ever afterward remember. He had a confused recollection of having raced forward, Sert on his left side, his right flank guarded by a huge, blond Viking warrior in scarlet casque and birnie; he found that the smoking heat-ray gun in his hand was exhausted. And he knew his eyes were still seeking the one Master on whom he had pledged his personal vengeance. But that one Master, the Master of Masters, Harg-Ofortu, was not to be found.

Perhaps he was one of those headless bodies who had fallen beneath the short-swords of the Carthaginians, or he might have been one of those impaled by the lances of Attila's wayward horde. Possibly even—but Larry hated to remember the typically feminine way in which that tiny band of Amazon allies had treated their foes. . . .

And then Sandra was beside him, sharing with him the triumph of the Masters' surrender. And to her he turned for an answer.

"You did this, Sandra?"

"I tried to tell you, Larry. It was the only thing I could think of. From Harg we learned how to operate the Time-warp machine. I set its dials, brought these warriors through to aid our cause."

"But the language! They speak a thousand tongues!"

Sandra smiled, and for the first time Larry noticed that she, like himself, was now wearing the *menauda* of the Masters. "And with this, so do I."

Sert was addressing the forlorn leader of the beaten Masters. "A new order rules. From this day henceforth there shall be peace beneath our Dome. No longer will there be Underlings, you Masters. Acknowledge this truth and your fellows will be spared. Together we will build a new civilization to surpass the old."

The Master nodded humbly. "So be it!" he said.

But in the moment of armistice came the last and greatest blow. A droning sounded

throughout the vast arena, and the voice of Harg filled the plaza.

"Think you that you have won, barbarian from the past?"

Sandra's eyes filled with alarm. She clutched Larry's arm tensely. "Harg! But where does he speak from?"

As if in answer to her words, Harg spoke again, his voice rage-choked and malevolent.

"Know then, fools, that in a few moment's time the last Master dies—and with him dies the civilization of this accursed planet! When I draw back this lever—"

Larry stiffened.

"The dome control turret! He has taken it again!"

## VII

**W**ITHIN arm's reach were a half-dozen riderless mounts of those who had died in battle. To the back of one of these Larry leaped. His nearest companion was an olive-skinned son of antique Persia. He glanced wonderingly at the white-complexioned six-footer beside him, but only for an instant. In this strange meeting place of the ages, existed no lingual difficulties. Larry wore the *menau*, and that headgear spoke in the one universal tongue, the language of thought.

Now, succinctly, he broadcast the meaning of this threat to the allies out of time.

"Only the Dome above protects us all from dreadful death. The greatest rogue of all has escaped, and has taken refuge in the chamber that controls that dome. If he pulls the main lever, he can bring it and the world crashing into ruin about us—"

As he thought, he rode, and as he rode a wide path opened before him. Others turned their mounts to follow, and the corridors of the domed city rang with the hoofbeats of a host salvation-bent. There was but one chance—to reach the turret and destroy Harg before he could pull that lever.

Larry was aware that behind him, beside him now, was Sandra. Her thoughts, incoherent, pleading, woman-like, reached him.

"No, Larry! Don't try to storm the turret. We'll take our chances with the

Time machine. Try to go back to our own time through it—"

"And leave a dead world behind us?" That was his answer. It was enough.

Harg's vainglorious farewell broadcast still went on.

"—Such a little time to live! Breathe deeply of the air, O invaders from another time. Taste its sweetness with longing, for all too soon the Dome will fall, letting in the blasting radiation of the dying universe. Then you, too, with it, will perish—"

Then suddenly his voice altered subtly.

"But what is this? You approach? You would storm the turret, save your petty skins?"

For already the first of the attacking party was drawing into the final corridor, preparing to break into the great room that housed the control turret.

"Stop!"

The command came, clear and incisive. Larry knew it was too late to win now. Harg knew of their coming; a touch of his hand would destroy them all. He raised his arm, halted the pell-mell advance of his diverse army with a gesture. "Let us hear what he has to say!" he ordered.

Harg's bargain reached him clearly. From where he sat, on the very lip of the tunnel that disgorged into the turret room, Larry could see the control chamber, could even glimpse the figure of the tiny scientist standing with one hand poised on a small red lever.

"Larry Wilson, warrior from a savage age, I speak to you, for it is you who led this revolt against my world. I offer you peace or death. It is yours to decide."

Larry's lips were white lines, grim and tight.

"Speak on!"

"First, I demand that the warriors you brought out of the past be returned to their own times."

"Go on!"

"Next, I demand that the Underlings lay down their arms and once more acknowledge fealty to the Masters."

Here a roar of rumbling dissent rose from the ranks of those Underlings who had joined the rescue party. Larry silenced them. "Anything else?"

"And finally," Harg's command bore a

snarling vindictiveness, "I require that the woman, Sandra Day, step forward to this turret as hostage until all these other things be accomplished!"

Sandra whisked the thought-revealing *mcnaudo* from her head, whispered pleadingly, "Yes, Larry! Say yes! It is the only way to save us all. We'll find another time—"

Larry trembled in an agony of indecision. There was truth in Sandra's words. Harg held them all at the edge of a sword now. Later, perhaps— But could he trust the little man's bargain? Might it not be another falsehood?

**A**ND then, suddenly, the decision was made for him. From the colorful knot on his right burst three riders, gay in blue and crimson. Handsome, perfumed, dashing riders with the eyes of hawks, the hands of falcons, the hearts of gallantry. Men to whom the worship of our lady in *domnei* was a life-long creed. And—

"Make no bargains," cried one gloriously, "with a shrinking rat! *Comrades! Pour la femme!*"

Before Larry could stay them they had broken past the barrier, were swooping down on the turret chamber. As they rode, their rifles spoke; bullets screamed against the sturdy metal. One pellet found its mark, and Larry glimpsed Harg's body staggering backward, sliding, falling.

Harg's last thought came to them all feebly.

"I die, then. But with me . . . dies . . . the world. . . ."

Larry shouted then. In a voice of thunder he roared, "Back! Back, everyone! For your very lives!"

For Harg's falling body pressed the fateful lever. Just in time the gallant *francs-tireurs* wheeled their horses, streaked back to the tunnels and safety. Then, with a roar like that of a thousand Niagaras, the broad, conical beam that splayed from the roof of the turret flared into jagged lightning. Earth trembled with the repercussion, up above that blast of pure energy struck the center of the Dome and smashed it into a million bits!

Then came the deluge; the frightful deluge of tons of broken *impervite*, crashing down upon the control room in world-

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# PS's Feature Flash

**FLASHING** you the highlights on the men you've met in the preceding pages—those cosmic-minded writers and illustrators who help to nourish Planet Stories.

## Meteoric Mr. Selwyn—

**A** NYBODY can be eaten by a five-hundred-pound bear in the Klondike. All you need is a railroad ticket and an overcoat. But it takes a man to interest those two-ton, four-eyed, ammonia-breathing tigerphants in the Frost Mountains on Jupiter. And an intelligent reader to appreciate him. A reader, who by his knowledge of astronomy and related science, realizes such things may be so and, by his quick imagination, appreciates their present fictional existence. . . .

Upon leaving the University of North Carolina, your author of "Revolt on the Earth-Star" suddenly found all his friends worshipping the little silver god—Job. Which made him rather a heretic as all the gasoline tabernacles were overstocked with college graduates, and he hated to get up in the mornings, anyway. So he took inventory: He had driven an ambulance, packed tobacco, studied archaeology, dabbled in Chinese, written gags in New York and dated a widow. Which prepared him for nothing—except writing. So he wrote stories and stories and more stories, and they came back and kept coming back.

Then Dr. Phillips Russell, author and teacher of creative writing at the University of North Carolina, told your author about George Lawrence Andrews, literary agent and critic over at Raleigh. So I talked to him and he read my stories. "Good," he said, "but they don't fit any market because they weren't aimed at any. You must specialize. I'll back you if I can find out what you can do." After more talk, he seemed to make up his mind about me. Maybe my "stark unusuality" made him see something in me I hadn't guessed at myself. Anyway, he suggested science fiction. And science fiction it was, and quicker than either of us expected he sent me a check, and soon another, and another.

Now, it is with naïve pleasure that your editor has been found pecuniary, and his readers as described in my first paragraph.

## An old acquaintance well worth renewing . . .

**RAY CUMMINGS**, space-story pioneer, author of "The Girl From Infinite Smallness," owes his success to no fluke of fate. For five years he was Thomas Edison's assistant. Before that he'd done many things: timber

shaking shards, deafening the ears with its tumultuous thunder, burying the tiny turret beneath sixty feet of broken dome. Thus died Harg, Master of Masters. . . .

**I**N the outer corridors, Sert sought Larry's side. His face was working bitterly, but he tried to control it. He said in a somber voice, "This is farewell, Larry Wilson. It is good to know that there were once men like you, and it is pitiful to know that so dies a world."

Sandra was crying, her body twisting with great, uncontrollable sobs. "Larry, isn't there anything we can do? Anything?"

He shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid not, Sandy. This is the pay-off. I don't know how long it takes for the radiation to work out on the human body, but I guess it doesn't take long. We've got a little while, perhaps, and then—"

He stopped. For from the far end of the corridor came a sound strange in that moment of sorrow. The sound of men cheering, laughing, hysterical with joy insurmountable. All turned and looked. There appeared a group of the Underlings, bearing upon their shoulders two men whom Larry recognized and a half dozen others, bearded, clad in rough garments, complete strangers.

Sert stepped forward swiftly.

"What is the meaning of this? Know you not that we are all doomed? Think you this is the moment for such unseemly laughter?"

But one of the Underlings laughed in his face; a carefree laugh of heart-filled happiness.

"Doomed, my leader? We have but *begin* to live! Behold—the two whom the Masters thrust through the Ground Gate five full hours since!"

Larry nodded. It was they, all right. Borl, who had been terrified, and his companion who had cheered him. He said, "Then in five hours the radiation did not destroy them?"

It was Borl who answered.

"In five hours? Nay, not in five years! Behold, my brothers, those have lived on the Outside for these past ten or more years. Remember you Treg . . . and Daiv . . . and our friend Mundro?"

Sert said dazedly, "I do! It is they.

There is no doubt about it. But how—?"

Sandra said, "Don't you see? It is true that the Heavside layer once broke down under the strain of excess drainage. But that was centuries, millenia, ago. And ever since that time, men have been living beneath the domes. The Heavside, being nothing but a gigantic field of force, regained its full potential, became once more an efficient shield between Earth and the deadly radiation from beyond.

"But within the domes, the Masters dared not venture outside to discover this thing. They exiled over-bold Underlings to their supposed death—and when the Underlings never returned, they assumed the radiation still existed. Actually, the men were glad to be free—"

The one named Mundro laughed heartily. "But naturally! Why should we return to slavery when we had a wide and beautiful world in which to live?"

"There are thousands like us outside. Free men, breathing the fresh air, feeling the mother Earth beneath our feet. Long years have we hoped and prayed that one day we might be strong enough to deliver you, our imprisoned brethren, from slavery. But until today, when these two were exiled, we thought there was no chance.

"Then, when we saw the Dome fall, we knew all was well. We shall rebuild a new world under the clear skies. The clear and beautiful skies. See, brethren, what I mean?"

He pointed skyward toward the gaping rent in the Dome. It was twilight now, and high above their heads shone a single star, white, white, piercing white against the dark sapphire of the heavens. Fighting man though Larry was, he felt something clutch at his heart, and his throat was oddly thick. At his side he felt Sandra's hand steal into his, and heard her whispering, "I know now what he meant—"

"Who, Sandra?"

"Dante," replied the girl softly. "When he returned from the nethermost pits of hell, he had but one greeting for the world he loved. He said, 'Thence we came forth—and saw the stars again—'"

**I**T was a silent group that met in the laboratory a short time later. Sert was there, Sandra and Larry, Mundro and the French lieutenant whose gallant defense of

cruised, drilled for the black gold of Wyoming, worked on a Porto Rican orange plantation.

He's lived in Bermuda and Quebec and Florida. In his wanderings he's weathered both hurricanes and automobile accidents. He's been shipwrecked in a terrible Atlantic gale, and on that occasion, his daughter, then a mere infant, was adrift with her parents in an open boat.

The shipwreck was a long time ago, says Cummings. Nothing very different has happened to me since then. The daughter is now fourteen. At the age of 13, under the name of Elizabeth Starr, she wrote her first fiction story—and sold it to *Liberty Magazine*.

We have been through several hurricanes since; we seem to specialize in hurricanes at sea, and in Florida and Bermuda. Somehow, I'm not afraid of hurricanes; but I am most uncomfortable when lightning is around. By the way, I wonder if any of your readers have ever encountered horizontal lightning? It's much more uncomfortable than the common or garden vertical variety. We lived, one summer, on a mountain top in Tennessee. Thunderstorms there are sometimes about on a level with you—and when a bolt flashes at you horizontally it is uncomfortable.

Maybe your readers have encountered something like the following: In Bermuda once, during violent electric storm—mid-afternoon in a bedroom with windows and door closed—I was aware of a smell like chlorine gas, perhaps; saw a purple-violet sheen of light on the floor near a bureau. When I stooped to investigate I saw, on the floor—or hovering quite near it under the bureau—a ball of purple-violet about as big as your head. It seemed about to come at me, and I got out of the room in a hurry. When I went cautiously back a minute later, it had gone. The floor was not scorched. There was no sign of anything.

A few minutes later, in the living room—which had a window open—the same ball appeared in midair over the radio. It floated swiftly to the fireplace, poised an instant on the top of an andiron, then went swiftly past my head and out the window. My wife, in the kitchen, let out a cry. I rushed there. She said the ball came in the kitchen window, missed her head, and went out the kitchen door.

Nice little playmate to have in the house with you, on a summer afternoon in Bermuda!

Can your readers tell me what it was? St. Elmo's Fire? Ionized air? Or what?

## Not For Art's Sake —

**U**NLESS it contributes something new, no magazine is worth its salt. In this issue Planet presents two new artists: Jean Fawcette (*The Tantalus Death*) and Bill Edwards, (*Dictator of Time*, and *Revolution on the Earth-Star*). Fawcette, a young Missourian, just recently arrived in New York. Edwards acquired his sophisticated style on a Wyoming cattle ranch, polished it last summer at the Swift Packing Company's N. Y. World's Fair exhibit, where he worked as a guide. Maybe you remember him: tall, 6' 3", and much like the men in his own drawings.

How does the work of these two boys compare with that of veterans such as Morey?

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# The Baker

# The Candle- stick maker

the banker and the farmer—all are adventurers at heart. Whatever trade he may ply—whether he lives his days in the shadows of Gotham's towering skyscrapers, or in the calm serenity of an obscure hamlet—man still feels the virile wholesome call of the adventure road. Those far paths still beckon him—the shark-infested sea trail that Albert Richard Wetjen writes about . . . the heat-hazed rimrock, the stamping-ground of Walt Coburn's low-spoken, quick-triggered sons of the Golden West . . . stories of distant lands, of Africa's steaming jungle and of India's hidden temples, where quick death lurks for the unwary and fortunes await the daring.

Here are such stories. Because they were written by men who write what they have lived, these tales ring with trueness. For western and adventure stories at their best, here are the two top magazines—the finest fiction of its kind, anywhere, at any price.

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Sandra had so unexpectedly turned stalemate to victory. Sert spoke for them all when he asked, "Then you must go, Larry Wilson? Can you not stay here and help us remold a world near to our heart's desire?"

"We must go, Sert," Larry told him simply. "Behind us we left friends, loved ones. It is best that we should return to the Twentieth Century. You others, I suppose, will follow."

He spoke to the *franc-tireur*. But the swaggering horseman shook his head, smiled, his teeth gleaming beneath his waxed mustache.

"Not I, *mon vicux!* This is a world to my liking. Besides, are there not legends on earth of troops of fighting men who disappeared strangely? There are none who returned. I think me this is a natural thing. This new world needs new blood, fighting blood, strong men. And anyway"—he twisted his mustache roguishly—"did you notice those Amazon maidens? Sturdy baggages, but—*aah, mon cher, ravissante!*"

"Perhaps you're right," acknowledged Larry. And for the last time he gave his hand to Sert. "This is a one-way passage, my friend. We go back to our own time, but—"

"Yes, Larry Wilson?"

Sandra answered for both of them.

"What Larry means to say is—if the occasion ever arises when you should need us, do not hesitate to send for us. Yours is the means of bringing us to your world. And we'll always be ready and waiting."

She paused a moment, then blushed. "It shouldn't be hard to find us," she ventured. "Because I think that we are going to be together—from now on. Isn't that right, Larry?"

"You forgot," said Larry, "the 'darling' part." He led her into the Time-warp field. They waved once more to their friends. Then Sert pressed a button. A shimmering field built up about them, cutting off their view. It was gray and weird, and the passage twisted and curved. Again, as long before, Larry experienced that wild, topsy-turvy sense of bottomlessness . . . of falling . . . of clutching for some support. His hand found something soft and warm that gripped his own. . . .

**H**E opened his eyes to find a black face peering into his; great white eyes staring with fright. A soft hand was under his armpit, raising him; a liquid Negro voice was demanding, "Yo' awright, boss? Yo' hurt yo'se'f? Ah di'n't see you fall till—boom! Theah you was! Yo' awright?"

Larry said, "Yes, I'm all right." Then he remembered. He turned swiftly. "The girl—where is she? Sandy!"

And Sandra was at his side. Both of them were on the steps in the Broad Street Station in Philadelphia. They were being stared at by curious eyes; a little crowd had gathered. Larry looked swiftly at his wrist-watch. The hands stood at 10:59 on the dot.

He said confusedly, "We—we're back where we started from, Sandy? Everything's the same, only—"

"Only," finished the girl, "everything's different, now." And she stood on tiptoe to kiss him. Somebody in the crowd sniggered. A veteran trainman chuckled and nudged a neighbor.

"Newlyweds?" he said. "You can spot 'em every time. Oh, well—nothin' like bein' young!"

Larry looked at Sandra, and a smile touched his lips. "We're not," he said, "what he thinks. But—it's a damn good idea."

Once more, to the vast amusement of their audience, their lips met. Then, arm in arm, they walked down the steps into the heat and confusion and bustling traffic of the world they knew. . . .

## **ARE DEMONS REBORN?**

**S**TARING Ted Stevens in the face was a photograph of Marie, his lovely wife. But this Marie D'Aubray of the daguerreotype had been beheaded and burnt in 1676 for wholesale arsenic murders. It might have seemed no more than a rather grisly coincidence to Stevens if murder—and by arsenic poisoning—hadn't cropped up next door. . . .

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# THE VIZIGRAPH

**M**ARTIANS, Venusians, Saturnians, Neptunians and Brooklynians—you're invited, all of you, to vizigraph in your messages. Kicks, kudos, bombs and bouquets—our expert operator can take it. All PS asks is that you make your vizigrams helpful and interesting.

## NOTHING, IF NOT FRANK . . .

OLON F. WIGGINS, *Editor:*  
THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN  
November 7, 1939  
Denver, Colorado

PLANET STORIES  
461 Eighth Ave.,  
N. Y. C., N. Y.

Mr:—

Just a few words in regards to your new publication PLANET STORIES. About the only thing that can be said in its favor is that it is a science fiction magazine. Your choice of reading matter is something awful, and I don't mean please. As a collector's item I welcome the magazine. As something to read, it just doesn't click. I'll naturally buy all that you publish, which probably won't be very many, unless you change your story policy, and unless you do change your policy, I can only hope that this is the FIRST and LAST issue. The yarns can't be rated, as one is just as putrid as the next, so I won't even undertake the job. Most first issues are, as a rule, not very good, so maybe by the next issue, providing, of course, that there is another one, you will have made some changes for the better. This being the case, I can only hope that you have a lot of luck with the effort, and that you will soon be in a position to go monthly, and that you show a letter department in the second date.

Until later, then. . . .

OLON F. WIGGINS.

## SO WE SAID . . .

MR. OLON F. WIGGINS  
THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN  
Denver, Colorado

December 22, 1939

DEAR MR. WIGGINS:

I appreciate your straight-from-the-shoulder letter on PLANET STORIES. Fortunately, not everyone who has read it agrees with you.

I would appreciate any advice you care to offer as there is no question in my mind but what PLANET STORIES, or practically any other magazine, can be greatly improved, and I gather from your letter that you understand the field.

Also, I'd like to publish your letter but I can't help feeling that we ought to tone it down just a trifle as it's somewhat too derogatory the way it stands.

Hoping to hear from you again.

Cordially, THE EDITOR.



## AND HE SAID . . .

SIR:

I have your letter of 12/22 to hand and am taking this opportunity to answer it.

I have always had a deuce of a time getting most of my letters to stf magazine editors printed, probably, because, as you put it, "straight-from-the-shoulder," "too derogatory." I usually mean it in all good faith, however, and always hope that the editors take it that way. I'm pleased to note, however, from your letter, that everyone doesn't agree with me.

Most stf magazines have a set policy for stories, and I've found that they always follow that policy regardless of what the readers might think of it. What I like in a story, someone else would not like, so it's tough on the editor, eh? So I see no reason to try to give you any advice on how to run the magazine. Probably the best way to run it, from yours and the publisher's viewpoint, is the way in which it will clear the most cash. There are some who read stf who would read it regardless of how bad the material therein happened to be (such as myself), others will quit the magazine for one which satisfies their particular taste in stf. If you are really open to helpful suggestions, the letters you receive should be of some assistance to you. I'm glad that you know that your magazine, since it is the first issue, can be improved, this applies to most all first efforts, and I hope you really make an effort to do just that. I understand the field of stf from my angle, and really think I could make a stf magazine work, but my policy probably differs quite considerably with yours, so instead of trying to give you any advice on how to run the magazine, I will just keep my mouth shut.

If you have to cut my letter to you to make it printable, I would be just as well satisfied if you didn't print it at all. Cutting letters is a policy I don't favor. Either print them in their entirety, or not at all, is my way of looking at it. So if it is not too late to leave it out of the second issue, do just that.

Looking forward to the next issue, I remain a reader and booster for PLANET STORIES.

Truly,  
OLON F. WIGGINS/SFF.

Ed.'s Note: NO CUT.

## THANK YOU . . .

11 Kappel Pl.,  
Rochester, N. Y.,  
Oct. 28, 1939.

Editor, PLANET STORIES—

DEAR SIR:

Having noticed that you intend to issue PLANET STORIES in the very near future, may I congratulate you and wish you the best of luck in the Science Fiction Field.

May I add a few suggestions? PLANET STORIES should come out more often than the scheduled quarterly printing. It should have some departments—author's biographies, story departments or something to do with science or science-fiction. Preferably something to do with the planets in view of your title.

It ought to contain a letter department where the readers can "air" their views.

No Science Fiction magazine yet published has as yet been able to get along without this reader's department.

As to PLANET STORIES the title is well taken. We have needed such a mag. title for a long time. And there are any number of good authors

capable of writing good interplanetary stories.

And now will close wishing you the best of luck again and hoping for a reply in a few days,

I remain,  
Sincerely

BERNARD A. SKURFT.

## PRATT AND MANNING, NO. 1?

Lincoln, Nebr.  
Nov. 6, 1939

DEAR EDITOR:

I just finished reading No. 1, Vol. 1 of PLANET STORIES. There is no indication in the mag. that you want letters from readers, but science-fiction fans being chronic letter writers, you are bound to get such letters, so you may as well have mine.

Best story is "Expedition to Pluto." Pratt and Manning know their science-fiction. Their science is adequate and their style is good, the girl fits into the story (instead of being a more or less decorative addition dragged in by the hair, as is so often the case.) A story satisfactory to most fans, I think.

Second place goes to "War Lords of the Moon." This is definitely a "type" story. "Earth man downs rebels on neighboring world, saves Earth, wins girl." It is a little better than average for the type. But if the Lunarians are aboriginal, as is suggested in the story, they are strangely "husky," for natives of a world having one-sixth Earth gravity. Mating of the Lunar maiden and the rather satisfactory hero, Ross, is scarcely a possibility (assuming they are not descended from a common human ancestry). Finally, the rocket-ship defies all rules for rocket-ship travel. No such vessel could make the trip to the moon in the manner described. It is elementary that such a vessel cannot maintain uniform velocity while the rockets are firing while out in space. The ship could make the trip in two ways. It could accelerate until it reached a desired velocity (not less than the "velocity of escape" of about 2500 m.p.h. near the Earth) then coast at that rate until nearly to the moon, and decelerate. Or it could accelerate steadily until about halfway there, then decelerate the rest of the way. There are other factors, but these are the simple points familiar to most science-fiction readers. I realize that this matter is not fundamental to this particular story, but accuracy in such details adds a lot to any story.

Third place goes to "The Cave Dwellers of Saturn," *tridium* is certainly remarkable stuff. And as for finding an obviously heavy, radio-active substance in caves near the surface of Sturn, which has a specific gravity less than water—well, rather doubtful, it seems. Murdock, the heroic villain, or something, is pretty unconvincing. Nothing to say about the space-ship, since it isn't rocket-driven. Best thing in the story was the series of events, beginning with the girl stowing away, which culminated in the discovery of the tridium.

"The Golden Amazons of Venus" brings up the rear, although it isn't far behind "The Cave-Dwellers of Saturn." As a matter of fact, it is more convincing than the latter. However, the plot is so moth-eaten that only a story outstanding in other respects could justify its use. This story isn't that, but it is a pretty fair adventure story, although with a rather juvenile appeal. The ship is cockeyed, with its "maximum velocity of 50,000 m.p.h." It should have an average velocity of about that for the trip, reached by one of the two methods mentioned in reference to "War Lords of the Moon." And I'm afraid those dolphins

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would have drowned on that long underwater trip. They are mammals, not fish, you know.

All in all, the magazine is pretty fair for a first issue, with one good story, one average one, and two others not too bad.

I like the length of the stories, and the idea of devoting the entire mag. to inter-planetary tales appeals to me especially. They are my favorite type. I should like to have them more adult in appeal. I like also, the absence of puzzles and other such "features."

Here is a list of some recent good stories which may be termed "planet stories. . . ."

Here's hoping for continued success.

Yours sincerely,

D. B. THOMPSON,  
3136 "Q" St.

## EXHIBIT B.

December 22, 1939

DEAR MR. THOMPSON:

I was exceedingly interested in your keen analysis of the various stories and I'm sure your letter will be a great help.

We seem to have contrary opinions in one or two respects as I felt *THE GOLDEN AMAZONS OF VENUS* was pretty good. Incidentally, I mentioned your comment to Mr. Reynolds in regard to the dolphins and he told me to tell you that while the word may have been misleading, dolphin should not be confused with porpoise as it is a medieval term for an animal which no one is certain ever existed.

Anyway, I wonder if you would consider giving me permission to print your letter in the next issue. It's a little long so I would have to cut it in several places but I believe the other readers would be exceedingly interested. I would also appreciate hearing from you again as you seem to be very well versed on the subject.

Cordially,

THE EDITOR.

## MAYBE HE'S RIGHT ABOUT THE DOLPHINS. . . .

Lincoln, Nebr.  
Dec. 26, 1939

Editor, PLANET STORIES

DEAR SIR:

Well, well—the editor writes the fan—that is much like the man biting the dog, only more interesting.

Of course, you may use my previous letter, in any form you choose. And if you think *PLANET STORIES* will best be served by printing only the "boquets" and deleting *all* the "brickbats" I heaved your way, it is O. K. with me, although I won't agree with you in such a policy.

My apologies to Mr. Reynolds anent the dolphin—his information on the subject is undoubtedly more comprehensive than mine, although I think the dolphin is usually identified with the porpoise. Incidentally, I don't want you to misunderstand my criticism of *The Golden Amazons of Venus*—it is a pretty good story of the type popularized by Edgar Rice Burroughs; but so many such stories have been published that the type, regardless of quality, has lost its punch.

Well, you will hear from me again.

Yours sincerely,

D. B. THOMPSON.

Ed.'s Note: \*ONLY CUT.

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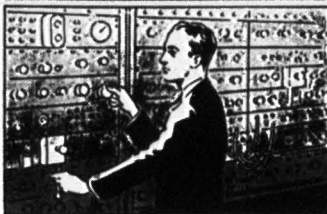
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"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N. R. I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station W8UI. I am also connected with Television Station W0XK."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."



## Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

J. E. SMITH, President  
National Radio Institute  
Established 25 years

RADIO IS A YOUNG, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

**Why Many Radio Technicians  
Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week**

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

**Many Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra  
in Spare Time While Learning**

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAYE, ALL-PURPOSE NET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while

learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

**Find Out What Radio Offers You  
Act Today!** Mail the coupon for my 64 page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. **ALL COUPON** in an envelope or paste on a reply postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President  
Dept. 08G, National Radio Institute  
Washington, D. C.

**MAIL NOW · Get 64 page book FREE**



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 08G,  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

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