

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

15¢

SUMMER
ISSUE

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



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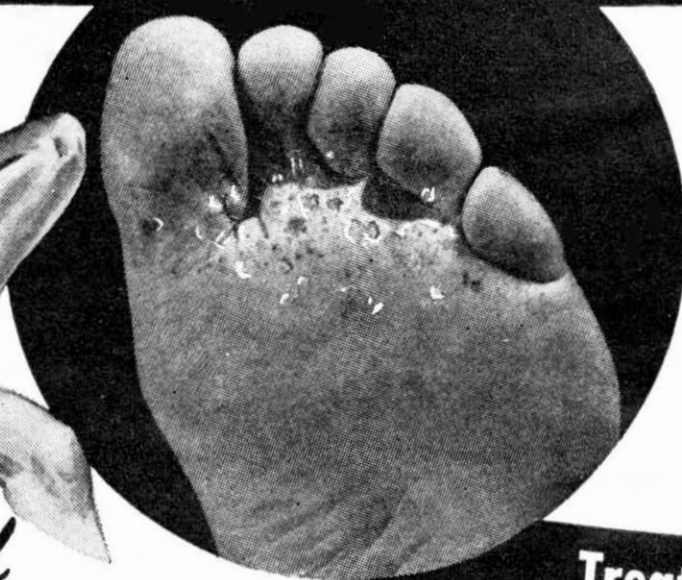
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An Amazing Complete Novel
By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

**PRIESTESS OF
PAKMARI**
A Fantastic Novelet
By ALBERT DE PINA

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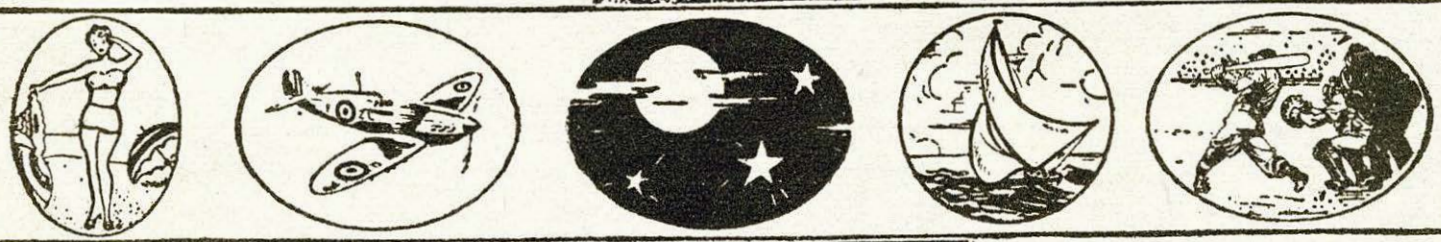
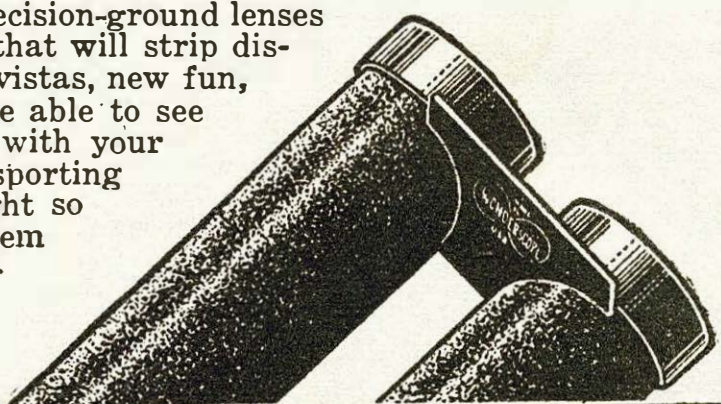
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The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

Vol. XXVI, No. 1
Summer, 1944

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By **ROSS ROCKLYNNE**

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Published quarterly by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Copyright, 1944, by Standard Magazines, Inc. Subscription (12 issues) \$1.80, single copies, 15c, Foreign, postage extra. Entered as second-class matter May 21, 1936, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk.

August, 1944, issue

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

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A Department Conducted by SERGEANT SATURN

ROLL up your sleeves and a fresh barrel of Xeno, Frog-eyes. Before we seal all ports we'll take a brief squint at the manifest and see what the chief pilot has ordered stowed in the forward hold for future fuel to run the good ship **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**.

To forestall any impertinent questions from you junior astrogators I hasten to state that the old Sarge still gets Xeno in jugs also, but there is a temporary shortage of the fused quartz glass in the Plutonian bottle works, and I had to switch over to the economy or barbershop-size package.

Now, ere we get gassed in the slipstream or rocket jets of the hard-riding Cossacks from the out-lying planets—known better as kiwis and junior pee-lots—we will consider a few things to come, or what's cooking in the science-fiction pot.

LOOKING FORWARD

Loming ahead off the port bow, comes Fredric Brown with a hilariously funny yarn—crammed full of good science, too—about an observatory and some interesting and impossible stellar madness. **PI IN THE SKY** you will find to be a well-constructed yarn which packs a hearty laugh and a pay-off punch that is terrific.

Just a bit further along the spaceways Ed Weston is flagging us down with one of the best space-mining yarns we have seen in many a moon—and the old space dog has seen a lot of satellites, planetary as well as Xenoan. **COSMIC CARAVAN** will give you kiwis something to thrill about before long.

You've likely already spotted the headliners for next issue. If not, be advised that **THE ETERNAL NOW**, by Murray Leinster, and **THE LAST MAN IN NEW YORK**, by Paul MacNamara, are up to the minute in first-rate science and fantasy, while packing dramatic wallops at the same time. And as we rocket along around this sidereal year, every now and then we'll slip you a straight fantasy like **THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE**, **THE LOTOS EATERS** and **THROUGH THE BLACKBOARD** for the sheer entertainment value of the story itself.

Okay—or Roger—or Saturn. You space yardbirds take it up from here. Open the communications center, Wart-ears, and re-pack my ear-muffs with powdered aspirin. Sunrise on a guinea farm is like sunset on a Martian desert compared to the din which will now arise in the astrogation chamber.

Well, what do you know! The first rabbit

out of the ethereal hat is a full-length portrait of Sergeant Saturn as dreamed up by Kiwi Joe Kennedy. It's printed on this page—so look at it for yourselves!

There will be a brief pause for static denouncements.

Joe, I'm sorry, but you don't see elephants through a Xenoan haze; you see eight-legged



quadrupeds flying in echelon formation and doing the scarf dance with the Coal Sack. And a Xeno jug is not fashioned like that. But thanks for a good try. And thanks again for reminding me about Xeno. Hey, Wart-ears!

The first flash from the ether is from an old friend.

TEMPUS FUGITS

By James V. Taurasi

It's been quite awhile since I sat down and wrote a letter on "the latest issue of TWS," but what with War Work and then the Army, I just didn't have time, though I've been reading your mags right along and enjoying them greatly.

First a big kick: I do not like seeing **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** "quarterly"—I'd rather see *Startling Stories* combined with TWS for a monthly than have both magazines quarterly!

Now for the Spring Issue of TWS: The Cover—swell. You have a great artist in Bergey. He and Belarski are two of the greatest artists (covers) of STF. (Don't get me wrong I still rate Paul, Dold, and Wesso as tops) but you keep Bergey and Belarski coming at us and I won't kick. They are good!

Now the inside illustrations:

Here you have slipped now and then. This issue is fair, but it doesn't stand up on other issues.

(1st) Where is Wesso? Wesso is one of the best artists of STF and for a time he was tops in your magazine, then he ups and disappears! Why??? Bring Wesso back! You need him!

(2nd) Where is Schomberg?? You have him to do work for your other mag, but not Wonder! Why??? Remember you introduced him to STF, then no more Alex. Why?

(3rd) More Morey. You have the poor guy drawing his head off for your Air Mags; how about a few for TWS? (But they must be good.) How's about it?

(4th) Keep Marchioni. He's O. K.

(Continued on page 8)

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

(5th) This new artist (Page 13 etc.) shows promise. Keep him coming!

(6th) *Please, PLEASE* let us know who illustrates the magazine; a small byline—this story illustrated by—so and so—is all we need.

Your stories are all O. K. with me, though I miss the "Character Series" of the old days. More "Character Series" and I'm satisfied.—*Brooklyn Army Base Terminal, Brooklyn, N. Y.*

You ask so many questions, Pee-lot Taurasi, that I'm a bit bewildered. Most of the artists are still at work, but they shuffle around in their work. You'll see them back on sci-fi jobs now and then. I'll pass along to the art department your suggestion about a by-line naming the artists.

TO THE POINT

By George R. Michel

I am writing to give you my opinion on the last issue of T.W.S. I will make it brief and to the point. It's GREAT! WONDERFUL! SUPERB! In other words, I like it! From time to time, of course, you have published a great many other swell issues. This issue however stands out because it was published during the midst of the paper shortage. With all the difficulties attached to war-time publication, it is virtually a miracle to produce such a good s-f magazine.

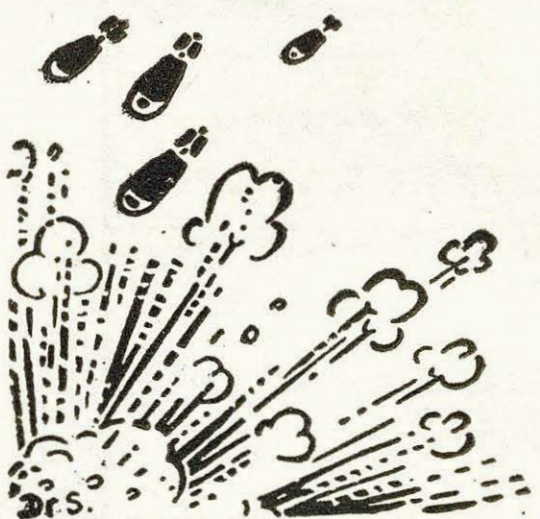
"Star of Treasure," by Charles W. Harbaugh is in my opinion a very good story, although "The Veil of Astellar" is even better. In the future more of Brackett's work *must* be printed in T.W.S. I believe that she will prove to be very popular.

The short story that aroused the most interest in me was the very good one entitled "Gas Attack." Notwithstanding its brevity, it seemed to me the best short story in the magazine. Ford Smith is to be congratulated upon his successful initiation into T.W.S.'s hallowed pages.

Ruth Washburn, the Amateur Story Contest Winner, also has written a very good story. I hereby gratify her greatest ambition: "That Washburn dame can write, can't she?" I think that it is safe to predict that she will take her place among the regular contributors to the magazine.

I faintly remember another story in which the characters of Wellman's short, "Gamblers Asteroid"

(Continued on page 104)



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(Civilian Bomb Corps)

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...AND IT IS EASY!

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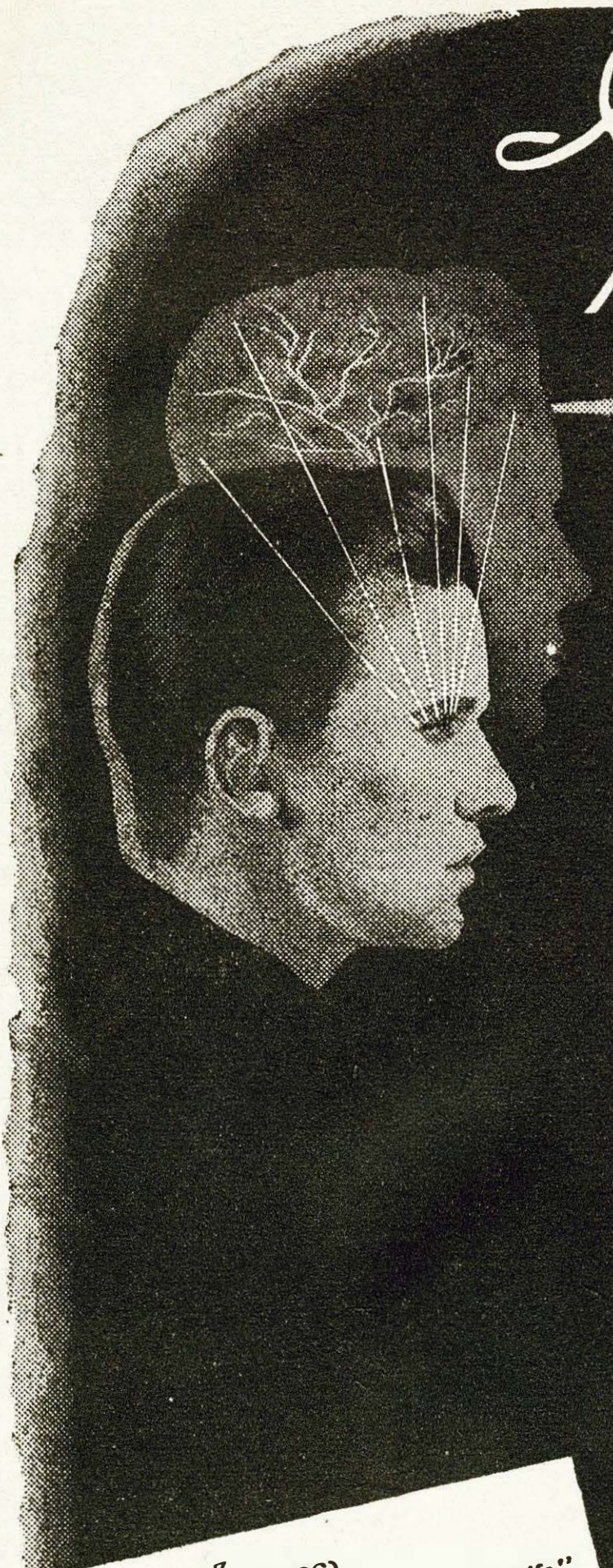
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The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

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All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

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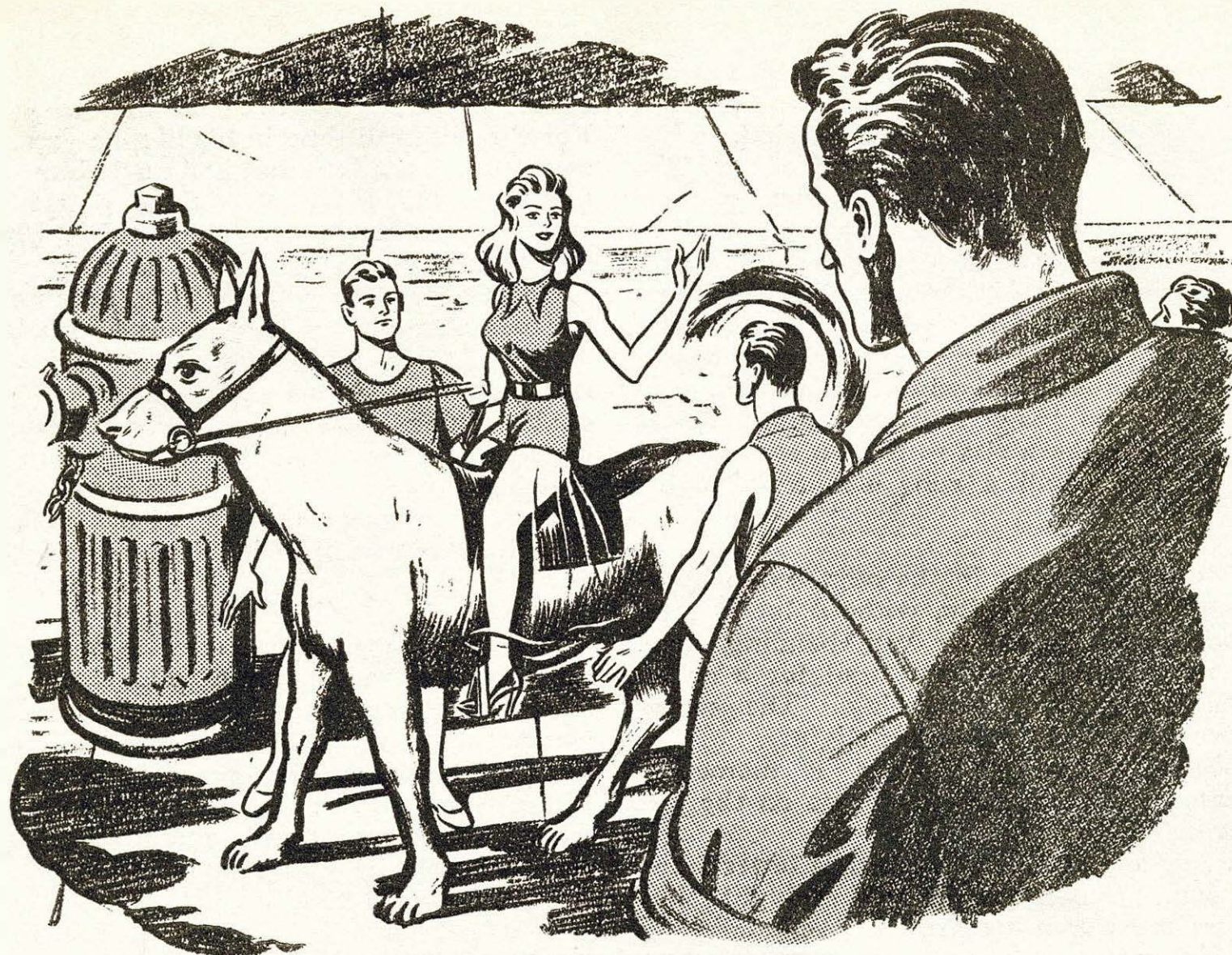
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Riding on the dog's back was Wilma

THE GIANT RUNT

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Trapped Under an Impenetrable Dome, Hollywood Faces Colossal Disaster as All Its People Descend into Smallness—with Only Perry Wren to Direct Their Battle Against a Weird Blight!

CHAPTER I

Blackout

PERRY WREN slid off the high stool in the savings withdrawal window of the Hollywood City Savings Bank, and went back to the files. He checked the signature on the withdrawal slip with the signature in the files, and then climbed back on his stool. He drew a sheaf of greasy bills from the till. He counted them out expertly and shoved them across the counter.

The young housewife accepted the money with an unhappy expression. She had asked Perry for nice, clean one-dollar bills. Perry had told her there weren't any more nice, clean one-dollar bills. The government had quit making nice, clean one-dollar bills. The government was saving paper, along with the rest of the folks.

Perry's mournful, brooding blue eyes watched the young housewife as she walked away. He was estimating her height just as he always estimated the height of everyone. This girl, who symbolized the unreachable

AN AMAZING COMPLETE NOVEL

distances between him and all girls, between him and all humankind, was five feet five.

Perry Wren was five feet. Period.

His next customer was a six-footer. The next was five-feet eleven. The next was six feet two. It went on that way, every day and all day. He dreamed of yardsticks at night. He would awaken in the morning, trembling. In his sleep, he had stretched himself on a rack until he was like other human beings—until he could look other human beings in the face and know that they didn't detest him because he was a runt. To awaken and find himself still a runt was truly nightmarish.

"Oh, Perry."

The senior teller in the next booth beckoned him abstractedly, without looking up from some papers he was bending over. Perry stared at his bent head for a sullen moment, without answering. The senior teller looked up, frowning slightly.

"Mind coming here for a moment—please?" An irritated edge was on the last word.

Perry slid off the stool with a bitter satisfaction. Sometimes people thought they could order him around like a child.

"I'm going to have to ask you to stay a few hours longer to do some audit work on a few new accounts, Perry" the teller told him. There was a cautious, uneasy politeness in his voice.

Perry was just dispirited enough to let his temper get the best of him.

"Why don't you pick on somebody else to do after-hours work for a change?" he snapped.

The senior teller carefully put down his pencil. "Look, Perry," he said coldly. "I'm not picking on you. I never did pick on you. I don't know of anybody in this bank that's ever picked on you." He stopped. A baffled, puzzled expression grew on his face. "Oh, for gosh sakes, Perry!" he exclaimed helplessly. "Can't you grow up? The only reason I decided on you is because you've got a good head for figures, and both of us can finish up the work in record time."

PERRY tightened the already beautifully tied knot in his tie and turned away with a scowl.

"You don't have to bother flattering me," he said sulkily. "I'll do it."

The bank would close in fifteen minutes. Perry went back to his window and bitterly climbed onto his high chair.

At nine o'clock, Perry Wren was driving his coupé eastward on Sunset Boulevard.

His mood was still sullen. Picked him because he had a good head for figures—hah! For the billionth time in his life, he passionately cursed the fate that had made him only five feet tall. He had kept out of athletic games of all kinds, any competition where people might see what a runt he was.

He had shied away from girls, because he believed they always laughed at him behind his back, poked fun at him. He was friendless and alone. Alone except for movies and books. Books were his real companions. In them he sought refuge. He had an education that was encyclopedic, just from reading. He knew Los Angeles, the city of his birth, as if he himself had built it. He understood a dozen sciences thoroughly, and had acquired a smattering of a dozen others.

He was steeped in self-pity as he turned south on Vermont Avenue. The tantalizing image of Barry Fitz-Roy, the Tarzan-like, six-foot-four movie actor, kept dancing in front of his eyes. He never failed to see Fitz-Roy's pictures. If only he had those broad shoulders, those smoothly-muscléd arms—if only he was as tall and manly as Barry Fitz-Roy!

It was useless to dream. It was quite impossible. He choked back a sob, and vengefully rammed his foot down on the accelerator. But his suicidal tendency was lost when a fluctuating, highly disagreeable siren scream ruptured the night.

Street lights began blinking off.

Blackout!

Perry quickly turned his car in to the curb and parked. He sat there helplessly. There was no place for him to go. He would have to stay here until the all-clear sounded.

Fifteen minutes passed. The streets were empty. The rush and roar of traffic had ceased. Perry Wren forgot his misery long enough to marvel at the precise system of men and machinery which could cause a vast spreading puddle of a metropolis like Los Angeles to darken as if some winged monster were sweeping overhead, sucking the light away. And not only Los Angeles, but all of southern California to the Arizona border.

By now, every visible light in the city should be out.

Wren had parked his car on a side street just off Vermont. There were empty lots on either side, stretching in both directions toward both street intersections. There was one building in the middle of the block, this being a slatternly, condemned warehouse.

On the second floor of the warehouse, one window was lighted.

Perry frowned. The air raid warden for



Perry seized Fitz-Roy in a firm grip

this block had overlooked that light. Perry's duty was plain.

He hurriedly left the car, went up weed-grown stairs and tentatively tried the door. It was warped to the door-jamb, but it came open with some straining and panting. From all indications, whoever was occupying this warehouse must have been using some other door.

He edged into the echoing, musty interior and felt his way up a dusty stairs, guiding himself by a swaying, creaking bannister. Of course, he thought, this blackout would be a false alarm, just like the others, or else it had been planned for the express purpose of loading troops aboard leaving transports, under cover of darkness. But suppose the danger was real? An enemy bomber would need only that one square of brilliance as an aiming point for his bombs.

On the second floor, light showed beneath a door. A sense of adventure gripped him as he edged the door open, stuck his head in slowly. There were two rooms, the nearer one lighted, the farther one dark. Light was shining into the farther one, through the window.

The lighted room showed a sharp contrast to that part of the warehouse Perry had come through. It was clean. There were pictures on the walls. There was a modernistic davenport against the right-hand side of the room, chairs on the other. The floor was rough, uncovered, however. The farther side of the room was unfurnished, apparently to make way for the tangle of cables, of generators and transformers which cluttered the floor.

In the corner of the room a man in a sooty white smock bent over a solid, staunch-looking mass of machinery which was standing on a pedestal. He was a stocky, dark, well-fed man with a cockatoo crest of rich brown hair standing on top of his otherwise hairless head. Perry thought the man had a certain physical resemblance to Claude Raines.

A floor-board creaked under Perry's foot. The occupant of the room turned with a startled motion. His electric blue eyes held Perry's for a grim, wary instant. Then he seemed to relax, though his voice was sharp when he spoke.

"Who are you, lad? What d'you mean, breaking into the workshop at this time of night?"

RED-FACED, Perry flinched at the word "lad." His apologetic manner altered to one of mortified anger. He made a strangling sound.

"I'm a grown man and not a 'lad'," he almost yelled back.

"Who said you weren't a grown man?" The man blinked rapidly, grinned a little.

"You were kidding me about my size," Perry snarled. "I didn't come up here to be made fun of. There's a blackout. You've got the shade up in that other room."

The other made a sudden, wry face. "Well, hang it all, I've been waiting for a blackout!"

He turned, moved with a long, limping stride into the darkened room. The window-shade clipped down. The man came out, hurriedly.

"You're the new air raid warden for this block?"

"No," said Perry. "I just happened to be stuck outside and I saw this light. I'll get out of your way now."

"No! Whoa! Wait!" The man grabbed Perry's arm insistently. "Wait a minute, lad. Pedestrians aren't allowed in the streets during a blackout, are they?"

"No, of course not," Perry admitted, making a feeble attempt to release himself.

The other beamed. "Stick around then, lad—eh? Fine. Allow me to introduce myself. Dr. Alex Fabricus. You've heard of me, of course. Inventor of the Fabricus audio, the Fabricus sound-track, the Fabricus dishwasher, the Fabricus onion-peeler, and assorted lowly odds and ends. And lately the Fabricus torpedo, the Fabricus bomb-sight, the— Well, here, I'll show you my latest. I didn't catch your name?"

"Perry Wren," said Perry, and Fabricus grabbed at his arm and pulled him toward some machinery in the corner of the room.

Fabricus stood over the machine, rocking back and forth on his heels in a pleased fashion. Perry was vaguely miffed as the scientist talked.

"Perry, my lad, this is the greatest defensive weapon ever invented. A protective dome or force shield over a designated area at the flick of a switch. Yes, sir!" He pointed to the gasoline generator on the floor. He followed the hook-up through the transformer and up to the slanting face of the instrument board. "I'm not depending on city power. When the dome goes up, city power will be cut off from the enclosed area. Here's the heart of the machine—these tubes." He flicked a fingernail against a hexagonal bank of de Forest tubes. "It generates the force-dome, a force-dome which will be as solid as one of metal. Neither Jap ships nor Jap bombs will get through. Well, what d'you think of it?"

He shot the question out abruptly, looking

down at Perry in what Perry felt was a patronizing manner.

Perry was impressed, both by Fabricus and his machinery, but Fabricus' attitude toward him was not pleasing.

He shrugged. "I doubt if such a dome could be thrown up," he said stiffly. "And even if it could, there won't be any Jap planes. You can bank on that."

"No?" said Fabricus, politely.

"No! They put these blackouts on for practise."

And, of course, it had to be then that the first anti-aircraft guns sounded.

The building shook with a distant, pounding series of concussions. And then the very world split—one long, rolling peal of thunder that vibrated through Perry's bones. He whirled, held Fabricus' eyes with growing horror.

Fabricus' mobile lips writhed in a chiding grin.

"No?" he repeated. "That sounded like a bomb. Come on, we'll make certain first, though."

He led Perry up a rickety flight of stairs. The scientist had hard going because he had to favor his game leg. "My nephew owns this building," he panted. "He told me I could use the second floor until the city tore it down. I work as a research engineer for one of the defense industries, lad. During the day, that is. In the evenings and pretty late in the night, I work here, isolated from people's homes. If something explodes, nobody's hurt but me, see? Imagine it? An actual air raid!"

They came out onto the roof. The scene was one Perry would not soon forget. The anti-aircraft guns were truly at work. Westward, miles away, flak laced the sky with a whitely furious, ever-changing pattern of light. The sprawling black buildings of the city were lighted in that pallor. Through the growing clamor of the guns, Perry now heard, distinctly, the tearing, racking roar of falling bombs. Mushrooms of flame, startling and beautiful, grew and died away, only to be replaced by others.

"The Japs are attacking America, the land of the free and the home of the brave," Perry thought. "It can't happen here."

He watched with cold fascination. He didn't know that Fabricus had left his side. Didn't know until, abruptly, the sound of that distant battle on the outskirts of Los Angeles was cut away as if the knife of a guillotine had fallen.

The sound was gone, but the changing field of brilliance remained.

But directly overhead, along the whole breadth of the sky, the moon, the very stars, were dimmed, as if a subtle, obtruding curtain had been drawn across them.

BEHIND him Fabricus chuckled. "You'll hear no more guns or bombs now, lad. The dome is up. Sound can't get through. Neither can bombs or planes."

Perry was dizzy with relief and consternation. "The dome works!"

"Perfectly. Nothing solid can get through." He made an irritated clicking sound. "I couldn't throw the dome over all of Los Angeles," he confessed. "Most of the city is open to the enemy. But all of Hollywood is enclosed for a radius of two or three miles. Well, when the authorities learn how I have guarded Hollywood, they will most certainly assist me in building larger machinery. In its way, this is only a test."

Words choked in Perry's throat. Words of thanksgiving. With such a dome as this, the war was practically won. It could be used to shield supply bases, airports, munition dumps, convoy ships—almost everything.

He gripped Fabricus' hand.

The battle was over almost as soon as it had begun. The anti-aircraft guns ceased their fire. Either the attacking force meant to make only a brief, surprise foray, or they had been beaten off by ground fire or defending coastal planes. Only two planes had got as far as Hollywood. Perry had seen a suddenly flowering light bursting in mid-air. A second later, there had been another flash of light—subtly different. Perry guessed what had happened. The pilot of that plane had dropped a bomb, which had exploded against the dome.

The plane itself, driving on, had smashed headlong into the dome.

At any rate, those few bombs that had fallen couldn't have done much harm to Los Angeles proper. Most of them had certainly fallen on the outskirts.

In Fabricus' workshop some minutes later, Perry saw that the dome-producing machinery was lighted strongly. The gasoline generator was quietly chugging away. An almost invisible stream of flame wavered between two electrodes.

Fabricus flipped a tab. The machinery died. Fabricus explained that neither water nor electric power could get through to Hollywood while the dome was up.

"The dome is down now, though, and outside of some temporary inconveniences for

the people, things should be working smoothly again."

Perry vaguely hoped that people who had been using their gas burners, had been sensible enough to turn them off.

Fabricus looked shrewdly at Perry. "You stay here tonight, lad," he said energetically. "They'll keep the blackout on, anyway. And I want to keep in touch with you. After all, you're my witness that the dome worked."

They sat up for a couple hours longer. Fabricus did most of the talking, telling Perry about his days with Edison, the Wizard of Menlo Park. "It was I who gave Edison the original idea for the talkies, but I was young then and I didn't push him ahead with it, and besides, that was the year I broke my knee-cap."

Modesty itself, Perry thought.

He accepted Fabricus' invitation to stay over night. He didn't bother to undress. He lay on the davenport with a couple of blankets thrown over him. It had been an exciting day—a triumphant day. He had been in on the ground floor of an event that would most certainly, sooner or later, change the tide of war to total victory.

He drowsed. And as sleep claimed him, he was bitter.

What did he, a five-foot runt, care about anything, even a force-dome that kept out Jap bombs, when he had an affliction medical science could never erase? He went to sleep, finding himself in a madly delightful dream wherein he was Barry Fitz-Roy, racing powerfully through African treetops with his mate slung over his shoulder. . . .

Perry awoke in the morning, took one look at his watch, and bounded to his feet with a yelp. It was ten o'clock, and he was an hour and a half late for work. His heart sank. He ran from the room, forgetting Fabricus, forgetting the events of the night before. He came to the head of the stairs, and stopped short. The rickety bannister of the stairs had torn away from its moorings. Lying at the foot of the stairs was a tattered bundle of flesh. Fabricus!

In an instant, Perry was leaning over the unconscious man, his throat constricted with pity. Perry's mind worked swiftly. He lifted the man's cold hand, tickled the palms. The fingers flexed. He took off a shoe, ran his finger over the tender part of the sole. There was no muscular reaction. That meant a broken back!

And how long had Fabricus been lying here? It was evident that he had risen early, and in the partial darkness, had lurched against the bannister, and tumbled down the

stairs in the wreckage. Perry remembered that Fabricus had limped slightly.

"To the devil with my job," Perry thought. He ran upstairs, grabbed every blanket he could find. Tenderly, with infinite care, he wrapped the chilled body of the inventor. As an added measure he got coats, old rags, everything he could find. Now for a doctor!

He ran from the building.

He stopped stock still, his face paling.

The street was swarming with people. Naked people, with turkish towels, large handkerchiefs or some similar concealing cloth around their waists.

People? Midgets! Pixies—approximately one foot tall!

CHAPTER II

The Giant Runt

TRANSFIXED, Perry absorbed the scene, his mind drugged, refusing to believe. For there was nothing that was believable here. These midgets were yelling, screaming, running back and forth across the street, gathering into groups, chattering for a moment, and then dispersing. They were terrified, horribly put out about something.

There were men, women and children among the pygmies. The children were dolls in their mothers' arms, scarcely three inches from head to toe. Some of the women were draped in dresses, full-size women's dresses, which dragged out behind them.

One man was in the act of putting a hat on his head. The hat went all the way down to his hips. He snatched it off, a horrible spasm of disbelief on his face. He ran forward with whimpering cries, came to the curbstone, and like a man climbing from a swimming pool, levered himself onto the sidewalk.

Near him, licking its jowls, Perry saw a crouching cat. The cat's tail was moving back and forth with quick little jerking motions. Perry's mouth opened in a cry of horror as the cat pounced. For the cat was a normal-sized cat, a huge, shaggy beast compared to the man.

The man screamed and went down.

But he was on his feet almost immediately. He was screaming. He ran. He jumped from the curb—a three-foot jump for him. The cat let him go a certain distance, then bounded lightly after him. The cat's paw reached out and sent the midget staggering.

Perry's sluggish brain awoke to life—too late. An excited canine barking, thundered

down the narrow street. Perry saw a half-dozen mongrel breeds coming pell-mell. Tawny eyes blazed as tabby flicked away into a vacant lot. The dog pack had not the cat in mind, however. They bore down on the naked midgets, tongues lolling. Naked midgets, now, because the midgets ran, and did not bother about such minor details as holding onto their makeshift clothing.

They scuttled off in a spreading semi-circle from the excited beasts. Whether or not the dogs were acting in a spirit of play, Perry Wren knew he had to do something about it.

He darted into the street, into the path of the barking animals. The foremost dog was a mottled gray, with vicious little yellow teeth. There was some terrier in him. He was normal-size, which made him a giant beast relative to the midgets. Perry was too late to stop the horror that occurred. The leader of the pack reached the midget who had already been mishandled by the cat, closed strong white jaws around him and shook him. The dog then dropped its victim, growled at Perry, and backed up.

Perry was white with rage. He flung himself at the dog, caring nothing about himself. The whole dog pack turned and charged at full speed across the empty lot.

The street was entirely cleared of midgets.

Perry was shaking violently. Little specks were dancing in front of his eyes. Something hideous was happening—happening before his eyes. He was insane. He must be insane. And yet he had seen them. Pygmies! And at his feet was what should be proof. The pygmy who had been caught. He was bleeding, terribly. Bright red blood. Perry stooped, and with fumbling fingers, lifted the limp little body. He felt dazed. Behind him on the floor of the warehouse, lay Fabricus, dying perhaps. Here was a little midget, possibly dying, also. They needed doctors. They needed them right away.

In another second, still carrying the midget, he was stumbling across the street, was slamming the door of his coupé behind him. For the first block, the motions of the car betrayed his own emotions. It careened down the block, valuable tires screeching. He got it under control and then pressed the accelerator down to the floor boards. There was a doctor's shingle two blocks ahead.

The streets swarmed with midgets, who skittered out of his way, and then yelled after him at the top of their voices. Perry got the idea they were asking him to help them. He felt ill.



Cooks stood on the stoves and stirred the stew-pots while Perry watched

He jammed on the brakes again and leaped from the car with his midget burden. He found momentary relief when he saw no other midgets within a block. He clattered up the stairs onto a porch. The doctor's door was open. Perry stepped in.

"Doctor!" No sound.

On the floor, Perry saw trousers, shoes, shirts, silk stockings, silk underthings, a dress, a halter. The garments lay there as if they had simply fallen off the persons who had worn them.

Perry thought it must have been particularly embarrassing for the woman.

It was obvious that there was no doctor here. It was obvious that he wouldn't find a doctor. Doctors, along with everybody else, were out on the streets, and probably going crazy. But what about injured people like this one? Perry looked down at the pathetically limp little creature he held in his fingers. His breath caught in his throat. Injured? The midget's eyes were open—sightlessly. He was dead.

PERRY quietly placed the midget form on the davenport, and almost staggered from the room.

He stood on the doorstep, his nails biting into his palms. He was fighting with a remembrance that had talons in it. Fabricus had told him, "This is only a test." A test! Scientists should never put inventions to a practical use until they had been laboratory tested.

He raised his head toward the sky with a tremendous effort. His nerves quivered and his hope sagged. Just as he had expected.

Stretched across the sky, shifting with faint, beautifully tinted mother-of-pearl colors, was a film. It extended from horizon to horizon, that wondrously chromatic blanket of light. The sun was dimmed, as if one were looking at it through blue-tinted sun-glasses. All the yellow was gone.

Fabricus had turned the machinery off.

But the force dome was still up!

Perry's trembling hands buttoned his double-breasted coat and then unbuttoned it all over again. He was making a mighty effort to pull himself together. Something had happened that was beyond belief.

"But I mustn't let it get me," Perry thought numbly. "There's Fabricus. He's probably dying. He's the only one that knows anything about this. I have to find a doctor."

He knew, almost positively, what had happened. Fabricus' dome had protected Hollywood, yes. But it had had a second effect, an incredible effect, for the proof was all

around him. It had released a vibration, a radiation—something, which had unaccountably reduced the people of Hollywood to the size of midgets—small midgets at that. It was no time for him to go to pieces. Later on, of course, he probably would go crazy. He had a job now.

He found no doctor. He stopped at shingle after shingle. Homes were deserted. The streets swarmed with maddening midgets, trying to find out what had happened. There were no policemen. Of course, their uniforms were too big for them. Hollywood was having a riot.

What was Perry Wren to do?

He was near the Ambassador Hotel, when he heard a girl begin to scream. He turned and saw a tiny girl, standing on a wall beneath an arching acacia. Below her, on the sidewalk, a wolflike chow dog was standing, barking. As Perry watched, the chow leaped through the air, its forelegs catching on the edge of the wall. The midget girl, practically naked save for a small Mexican serape tied around her body, again screamed piercingly. The dog burst into a vicious growl and poised for another leap.

Perry left the car in a rush. He came to a wary stop as the chow faced him.

"Get!" Perry bawled suddenly. "Go on. Get!"

The chow crouched. Its wicked eyes narrowed. Perry kicked out frantically with one leg, knocked the dog against the wall as it leaped. By the time it came at him again, he had his coat off. He wrapped the coat around the creature's head and hung on for dear life. The dog grew more furious, its legs lashing at mid-air. Perry lost his balance and found himself in the gutter, the dog on top.

It was strange how the human mind works sometimes, he thought then, how one could coolly reason even while death is snapping at one's throat. For Perry Wren found himself wondering about that dog. The dome had caused humans to shrink. Why hadn't it had a similar effect on animals? This chow was full-size. The other dogs, and the cat he had seen were full-size, too. Why hadn't they shrunk? The answer, of course, was obvious. The animals simply had something which protected them from size-reducing radiations. Or it was something they didn't have that humans did have.

A soul, maybe. But why, then, hadn't he and Fabricus shrunk?

He laughed inwardly at the thought—laughed even as the chow ravened at his throat. He was going insane, of course.

Insane or not, he had to fight!

He kept to his original purpose, a purpose that had been conceived in a second of thought. He tied the coat sleeves around the dog's neck in a square knot. He threw the dog away from him with a conclusive motion. He left it to go mad in the street, trying to disentangle itself from the coat. Shivering with revulsion, Perry crossed to the little midget girl on the wall. The wall was pitted, rough. The dog must have been pursuing her, and by a miracle she had climbed to the top.

She was lying unconscious on the top, and seemed in imminent danger of rolling off. Perry swept her up, darted back to the car, and drove furiously for a block before he stopped. He felt foolish. There hadn't been anything to run from, really.

The half-clad midget girl stirred. She moaned. She sat up and moaned faintly.

"It's all right, miss," Perry said hurriedly. "He's gone."

HER blue eyes focused slowly on him. She started to cry. She swept her tumbled mass of red-gold hair from her face.

"It's been terrible," she gasped. "Everything. I was fixing my hair last night. It was just after the blackout and I had candles burning on the vanity. And all of a sudden I was only a foot high and I was naked. I shrieked. But everybody else was yelling, too. My landlady came in to see if I was small the way she was. Then she fainted. I had to take care of her. I had to take care of that young man in the front bedroom, too. I had to take care of everybody. It was a crisis. I'd just finished my advanced first-aid course, and I couldn't lose my head. I—I haven't had time to get hysterical myself, so now I'm g-going t-to—let myself go!"

"Hold it!" Perry snapped. "Miss—Miss—Miss—?"

"Wilma Warren," she supplied wearily. "What there is of me."

Perry was suddenly pleading. He told her about the dome, about Fabricus, himself.

She nodded drowsily. "All right. Maybe we can help him." Her lower lip quivered. "And just on the very day they wanted me to come to the studio for a part in Barry Fitz-Roy's new picture, this had to happen," she said mournfully. "I'd—just like to get—one—break." Her words dribbled away. She was asleep.

At Wilshire and Vermont, Perry saw a clamoring crowd of midgets in front of Colliver's Shoe Store. The store was overflowing, too. It was a riot. Whatever display

had been in the windows was wrecked. Mannequin feet had been broken, chromium racks upended, shoes scattered. Inside, tissue paper and boxes littered the floor, were trampled on by a hundred tiny feet. Midgets hung on the shelves swarming like ants, pulling down whole stacks of boxes.

A fat-bellied midget holding a turkish towel around his waist ran in front of the car, his face frantic.

"Get out of my way," Perry yelled. "It's a matter of life and death!"

"This is a matter of my shoe-store!" the midget screamed, jumping on the running board. "I'm Mr. Colliver. I opened my store this morning. I wanted to serve the citizens during this terrible crisis. My son stood on my shoulders and put the key in the lock and opened the door. Then the people began to raid my establishment. They're stealing all my baby shoes. I'll be ruined. Please, please, you have to help me!"

Perry had a sudden thought.

"Okay," he snapped. "I'll see what I can do." He left Wilma Warren in the car, asleep.

The little man ran excitedly ahead, his naked stomach wabbling. "Here, you! Here, you people! I got a full-size human to help me. Clear out now."

The crowd didn't pay any attention until Perry forced his way into the shoe store. Men and women turned with startled motions, screamed when they saw Perry's towering figure.

"What do you people mean by rioting like this?" Perry demanded.

"A full-size human," a man cried.

Perry was shaken. Full-size! He kept his menacing expression, however.

"We didn't break any law," a midget woman at last said in shrill tones. "If you want to know who broke the law, it's that Colliver. The Japs dropped a size-reducing bomb last night."

Perry interposed.

"Wait a minute!"

His brain was suddenly whirling. A terrible event had occurred. Panic and death and mayhem and riot were at this moment sweeping the city. Dogs and cats were roaming the streets, suddenly wild and vicious in the apparent absence of their human masters. Rats were comparatively huge beasts, probably menacing children and adults alike. Thousands of these midgets were literally homeless. For, to them, climbing a flight of stairs was a triumph of effort. Five flights would be impossible. Elevators, of course, would not work in the absence of electricity. Food

could not be cooked, even if these midgets could effectively use their huge kitchens.

The full horror of the catastrophe struck Perry as his mind caught at the tragic limitations the size of these people imposed on them. They were without clothing or means of transportation.

They were savages, set into an alien environment by a frightening reduction in size. They were helpless. They had raved and screamed and gone mad for awhile—during the night, probably, while Perry was sleeping—and at first opportunity of hinging themselves onto reality, they were grabbing at it.

Already, they had invented a size-reducing bomb which the Japs had dropped.

Already they were clothing their naked feet, in an attempt to feel normal. Of course, they were stealing, but if they had the real facts, it might help.

And suddenly Perry was talking, telling them the whole story.

When he finished, a woman quietly fainted. Then everything was hubbub.

"But you're normal size. This—Fabricus is normal size. Cats and dogs are normal."

PERRY squirmed helplessly. "I don't know the answers. Only Fabricus knows them. All I can tell you is that Hollywood is completely cut away from the world. And I think that as soon as the dome is destroyed you'll return to normal."

"You're sure of that?" demanded one midget quickly.

"Well, reasonably," Perry answered.

"Because it's a relief to know we don't have to stay this way very long." The man ran his wrist over his perspiring forehead. His tense face relaxed.

"Now, wait a minute," Perry said hastily. "I wasn't saying—" Then he stopped. Let them believe what they would. The more optimistic they were, the less panic there'd be. He drew a deep, nervous breath.

"Well, that's neither here nor there. The main thing, I guess, is that we'll all have to remember that law and order must be kept. I don't want to butt in—" he was apologetic—"but rioting, stealing shoes must stop."

The midgets started yelling and screaming. They were back where they'd started.

"It's that Colliver!" the midget woman who had first spoken said wrathfully. "He tried to charge us three times the retail price for baby shoes. He's the one that broke the law. Hasn't he ever heard of a ceiling price?"

Perry gulped and felt like a dupe.

"Oh!" He turned. "Bring Mr. Colliver in here, please," he snapped.

After a minute, the red-faced store owner stood below him. Perry felt sorry for him.

"Nobody must profiteer at times like these, sir," Perry said kindly. "This is a crisis. Will you agree to sell these shoes at the retail price?"

Colliver was pathetically eager to make amends.

"One ninety-eight, two ninety-eight, three ninety-eight. And you won't find a better bargain in town."

Perry grinned, suddenly pleased with himself. "Okay! Now everybody line up and buy your shoes like ladies and gentlemen. But first I'd like some doctors, if there are any, who'll volunteer to help me with Fabricus."

Perry soon cradled four midget doctors in his arms, but before he could leave the store one of the little men tugged at the cuff of his smudged trousers.

"Hey, wait a minute. You can't go off like this. Aren't you going to help us? Tell us your name."

"Oh, my name's Perry Wren." Perry was apologetic, but inside a sharp premonition was growing, a frightening premonition. "I have to go, now," he said hastily. "I can't help you any more."

"I don't mean you have to help us, sir." The midget was earnestly beseeching. "I mean, all the people. The whole city. Somebody has to tell us what to do, how to go about getting drinking water and food and clothes and things like that. It can't be one of us little people, can it, sir?"

The rest of the midgets suddenly understood what their fellow was driving at. They started to cry Perry Wren's name.

"You're the only able-bodied full-size human being in Hollywood," the midget cried excitedly. "That is, not counting Fabricus. But he's sick and so that leaves you."

Perry felt a cold trip-hammer start pounding at the base of his skull.

"Sure, that leaves me," he echoed hoarsely. "But I'm not fitted. I can't take charge."

They drowned out his words with their cries. Suddenly all the anxiety that had been on their faces was gone. They were laughing and shouting and giggling. They were amused by their predicament, now that they had a champion to fight their battles. He would lead them from the maze.

Full-size. The only full-size human in Hollywood. The mad, ironic words thrummed in Perry Wren's ears. A soundless, hysterical laugh came to his lips. Wait until they had oriented themselves. Wait until they found out that he wasn't full-size

at all, but just a five-foot runt!

Suddenly he uttered a hoarse, barely audible cry, and charged from Colliver's shoe-store toward the car. His midget doctors clung in terror to his coat-sleeves.

But somehow he wasn't up to feeling sorry for himself for his pitiful height. In his mind there was a pounding, triumphant din.

He had come into his own.

He was a giant—in a city of runts!

CHAPTER III

Barry Fitz-Roy

SOON the station wagon drew to a gentle stop in front of the flower-bordered pathway of the Presbyterian Hospital on Vermont. Perry Wren got out, threw open the rear doors, gently lifted Fabricus' splinted, blanketed body. He started down the path and into the hospital.

"Handle him carefully," one of the doctors begged. "Might be a pneumonia complication."

"All I know is, he can't die." Perry muttered a trifle wildly. "He's the only one who can destroy the dome."

Fabricus was splinted crudely with thin boards Perry had torn from the walls of the warehouse. He had found the station wagon down the street, its ignition keys in the lock. It made a good emergency ambulance.

Perry went staggering up the marble stairs to the second floor where the private rooms were. He looked behind briefly, saw Wilma and the doctors hoisting themselves up the waist-high steps. Wilma was only on the third step. One of the doctors was reaching down, and giving her a hand. She got up to the fourth step and sat down weakly, panting.

Perry kicked open a pair of glass doors, went edging down a corridor. There was a

terrible silence here. He saw no nurses.

He opened another door. A few midgets were idly standing around, wrapped in huge sheets, faces stunned, blank. They were patients and probably shouldn't have been out of bed.

From the end of the corridor, Perry heard a sobbing, rasping scream that sent shivers to the marrow of his bones.

Lying half in and half out of the door was a midget who was entirely naked, save for loose bandages around his limbs and head. He was unconscious.

Perry pushed open hip-high swinging doors, and gently deposited Fabricus on the bed. He stood for a tense moment, looking down at the scientist. And suddenly Fabricus moaned. His eyes slowly opened. For a long moment, he met Perry's glance. His lips opened. Perry got hold of himself.

"Don't talk, sir," he begged. "It's all right."

"It's not all right," Fabricus gasped weakly. "Something's wrong. Something's haywire. I heard you talking in the station wagon—something about the dome—about midgets."

His eyes grew wild.

"Tell me," he rasped. "Everything. Before I go off again. I might be able to—help."

Perry could see muscles straining in his thick neck as he tried to get up.

"Don't sir!" he snapped. "I'll—I'll tell you."

He poured out the story.

Fabricus' expression was bitter.

"The trans-static currents," he whispered. "They're drawing energy directly from Earth's magnetic field, and the dome is maintaining itself. It will maintain itself forever unless something is done to destroy it. Lad, the dome must be destroyed. Only in that way will the people regain their normal height."

Fabricus' head dropped back to the pillow.

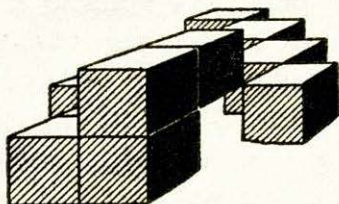
"I should have seen it," his faint voice

[Turn page]

BRAIN TEASER

THIRST PLEASER

How many cubes in this figure?



ANSWER.
There are ten cubes in the figure.



whispered. "I was a fool! The dome is creating a secondary stressfield, which is acting on the electronic orbits of people's bodies, keeps them reduced in proportions. When the dome goes, the people will regain their normal sizes."

"But—but how?" Perry stammered. There was no answer. Fabricus' eyes were closed. He was again unconscious, his face an unpleasant white.

Perry clattered back to the stairs, scooped up the four doctors and the girl on the fifth from the last step, and took them to Fabricus' room.

Before he left, he took a chair, a small footstool, and some books and built an easily navigable staircase from the floor to Fabricus' bed.

Now they could climb up and down.

Perry knew the main necessity was hot water bottles. He ran into the corridor, his brain whirling. Midgets. They were helpless. They'd all die. And Perry was the only "normal-size" man in the city

In the course of the next half-hour, he did find hot water bottles—only to discover there was no water.

But if he failed there, he was notably successful in the way he geared the disorganized staff to some sense of routine. In the corridor, he found the superintendent of the hospital—a dark mustached little pygmy—and some nurses, frantically urging patients to get back in their beds.

The superintendent had a face towel fastened around his waist with a paper clip. The nurses had each used two nurses' caps to clothe themselves.

They had punched holes in the crowns. One cap fitted snugly and concealingly around their hips; the other fitted just as snugly below their shoulders.

Perry had no choice but to help lift patients back into their beds. Meanwhile, the superintendent talked. Last night, his whole staff, his patients—everybody—had collapsed in size. Bandages, traction splints, operating instruments had become impossibly large. Patients died on the operating table when midget nurses and doctors fainted or ran screaming. Hospital employes of all kinds, orderlies, internes, nurses, doctors disappeared, fled. The present staff of the hospital included a dozen night nurses, and a half dozen doctors—pitifully inadequate.

THE patients needed food. There was one cook who had kept her senses. But she was too small to reach the stoves or the food. And, besides, there wasn't any gas.

Perry found himself involved in performing countless tasks. Nurses couldn't reach shelves for various medicines or instruments or gauze, and Perry handed such things down to them. He lifted nurses onto beds so they could take temperatures. After awhile, he realized he was wasting his time. He ignored the demands made on him. He got the superintendent to one side, and bluntly announced that if they wanted to, they could help themselves. Perry had other things to do.

They could build "stairs" out of books, boxes, chairs. This would enable them to reach shelves and patients with a minimum of effort and time. If the superintendent were smart, he'd instruct his nurses and doctors to use the dummy elevator up and down between floors. Five or six of them, heaving on the rope, could make the elevator move up and down.

Since the regular stairway took fifteen or twenty exhausting minutes to navigate, they could use books on the stairways to decrease the height of the steps.

"Delegate some of your help to gather discarded wood from empty lots nearby or from Barnsdale park. Build wood fires in your kitchen, if the flues will clear the smoke."

"But I haven't enough help."

"I'll see that you have help. And water."

The sluggish cogs in Perry's brain, so long out of gear, so long in the habit of avoiding responsibility, were forced to mesh.

He saw with a cold, horrible clarity that in spite of his innermost convictions of helplessness, an incredibly complex, and perhaps impossible job had been dumped in his lap. He was the only "normal-size" man available. This wasn't a case where you could reject the nomination. The peculiar workings of fate had already elected him. Perry was unavoidably, inescapably—it!

And as his mind accepted the inevitable it began to swarm with ideas. Water? Very well. Next to the hospital was Fire Station No. 35!

In the fire station no firemen remained. Apparently they had deserted their posts after becoming reduced in size. No matter. Perry knew that the single fire engine here was a pumper. He walked excitedly around the machine, touching lovingly at the self-priming booster pump—a booster-pump that held three-hundred and fifty gallons of pure water. Here was water enough to last the hospital a week, at least.

He was elatedly coupling two hose sections together, and these to the hose already fastened to the ejection valve in the face of the

tank when he heard a sound behind him. He turned around to find a midget coolly regarding him.

"You're Perry Wren, aren't you?" the midget demanded.

Perry gaped. "How'd you know that?"

"Everybody knows it by this time, old man. Grapevine. You're the new mayor of Hollywood, and you're going to save everybody." The midget laughed. "But that's neither here nor there. I can't drive a car. I'm too little. How about you driving me to the Blannery Brothers motion pictures lot on Van Ness—quicklike?"

He wriggled a ten-dollar bill longer than his forearm.

Thrills of recognition started wriggling in Perry's brain. The one-foot toy human was naked, save for a huge bandanna handkerchief, tied Tarzan-fashion, around a bronzed, smoothly-muscled body.

Perry flushed the deep, startling red of a schoolboy unexpectedly meeting his hero.

"Barry Fitz-Roy!"

Barry Fitz-Roy it was, as strikingly god-like, in miniature, as the jungle epics sweep the nation had portrayed him.

Fitz-Roy's porcelain-tipped teeth flashed in a blindingly Tarzan-like smile.

"Righto!" he answered. He added, in a low-pitched voice which must have carried all the way to the other side of the street. "Don't say my name too loud, though. It's beastly annoying for people to know I'm Barry Fitz-Roy, you know. Barry Fitz-Roy is a sort of god to most people. But I'd give anything to be just an ordinary human being."

"Of course," Perry jerked out, bug-eyed. "You shouldn't have dressed in that Tarzan costume though, Mr. Fitz-Roy. People will recognize you a mile away."

Fitz-Roy colored unaccountably. "Of course," he said hastily. "I'm so much like Tarzan physically, I suppose I'm getting into the habit of thinking like Tarzan." He smiled modestly.

Outside on the street, there was a growing clamor. A crowd of midgets had gathered. They were turned toward the fire station. Now they came scampering closer.

"Here they come," said Barry Fitz-Roy. "This hero-worship is terrible."

But strangely enough, the midgets entirely ignored Fitz-Roy. They shouted Perry's name excitedly. Completely amazed, Perry looked them over. It was almost eerie the way his name had traveled around the city. Everybody seemed to know him.

"Please sir," pleaded a middle-aged woman. She held a toy baby in her arms.

PERRY had never seen anything so pink and delicate. The baby was adequately wrapped in a beach towel. In fact, Perry thought with a surge of relief, clothing didn't really present a big problem.

These midgets were not what you might call tastefully or completely garbed, but in a situation like this, conventions would have to be thrown aside.

Some of the midgets were wearing baby shoes. Most of them were barefoot. Some of the men had donned baby-dresses, using them as sweaters. But most of the men had merely tied a piece of cloth Hindu-fashion around their waists. The women might have been taken from a photogravure section showing a group of South Sea Islanders. After the first shock of their size-reduction, they had wrapped large-size, colorful men's handkerchiefs tightly around their waists, forming skirts. They had similarly covered their upper torsos.

"Please, sir," the woman quavered unhappily. "We know how busy you must be, getting all the hospitals to working again, but we've got to have help."

Perry ignored the rather huge activities ascribed to him, staring with sudden pity. The woman's eyes were blurred with tears.

A man took the woman's arm consolingly. "Martha's upset—and thirsty, Perry," he said gravely. "In fact, we're all pretty much upset. We've got food, plenty of that for awhile, I guess. What I mean is, food is distributed pretty equally from one side of the dome to the other. Water is different. It's not distributed. They say electric power isn't coming through the dome, and so the pumps at Silver Lake Reservoir aren't pumping water into the mains. All the water is located either there or in Echo Lake or MacArthur Lake. There are a lot of people in Hollywood, Perry, and it's going to be too bad when they all congregate around those lakes and crowd up and start drinking impure water and start fighting each other for water when the lakes start to run dry. We were just now on our way to MacArthur Lake. We're all pretty thirsty, especially the children."

He stopped.

He and the growing crowd behind him watched Perry hopefully.

"Now," Perry thought, "they're expecting me to pull a rabbit out of the hat. They don't know I can't do it. All they know is that I'm a giant and they're runts and they're helpless and I'm not."

He understood the problem that had been thrown in his lap. If water were not prop-

erly distributed, the population would be concentrated around the only water sources there were. Which would mean disease and fighting. Then, also, the food in the city would be badly distributed, for the food, located in super-markets, in grocery stores, in warehouses, was distributed well only so long as the population was spread out and not bunched up.

In order to keep the people of Hollywood reasonably safe from the mob spirit that infects human beings during a crisis, an efficient method of water-distribution would have to be found.

Perry inspected the crowd. He could feel the heavy weight of this new responsibility.

"I'll see that the water is distributed," he said.

His own voice sounded unreal, faraway, as if he hadn't said the words.

After he had made this promise, a sensation of horror swept over him. While seeking to prevent what might well have resulted in death and destruction, Perry had made a pledge he knew was quite impossible to keep. His lips opened and closed as the crowd watched him. He gave out no further information.

"Here," he said. "Some of you lend a hand."

They assisted him willingly, eagerly. A half dozen of them grabbed at the hose and began pulling it to the street. Perry led them into the hospital, and back to the kitchens. Here, he made a great clatter, routing out every stewing pot and empty Crisco tin, every container of all sizes and description that he could find. A cold haste took hold of him. Fabricus should be his main concern, now. Maybe if Fabricus regained consciousness sufficiently in the next day or so, Perry could talk with him and find out how to destroy the dome. Then the numerous torturing problems that had suddenly confronted Perry, would not need to be solved.

Perry handed the nozzle of the hose over to the most capable-looking midget of the lot, told him what to do, and then ran back to the fire-station. Barry Fitz-Roy had climbed to the seat of a chair, and was sitting with his knees drawn up, a sullen, impatient expression on his face. He jumped to his feet as Perry weaved through the other midgets.

"Say!" he snapped. "I asked you to take me to the Blannery Brothers lot, didn't I."

Hurriedly Perry fiddled with the pressure-control on the slanting instrument board of the booster-pump.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fitz-Roy," he stammered.

"I'm too busy."

"Are you serious?" Fitz-Roy was sarcastic. "They're making the biggest Tarzan picture of the decade out at the lot."

Perry stared. "But they can't make pictures. All electric power is off."

FITZ-ROY then spoke with dignity, and as if that were plenty of explanation. "Miracle Man Maeberle is my producer" He frowned and looked at Perry Wren covertly. "Still, I guess maybe even Maeberle has his limits. Maybe even he isn't miracle man enough to keep working under conditions like these. I'll tell you what. I think I'll tag along with you, Wren. Looks as if you're going to have this city by the tail before long."

Perry looked at him blankly. "Yeah?" He shuddered. At that moment, he felt he would rather have a tiger by the tail.

He climbed behind the wheel of the big pumper and turned on the ignition switch. He kicked the motor into roaring life, raced it, and then settled it down to a steady pounding. He flipped a tab, and the booster-pump went into action.

Dozens of gallons of pure water went shooting through the hose, into the hospital kitchen, into the containers waiting there.

A midget came darting out of the hospital, waving his arms. Perry hastily shut off the engine.

In another five minutes, he had found a nurse who showed him where the hot water bottles were kept. She led him to the supply rooms on the second floor. Perry noted with pleasure that the superintendent had followed Perry's advice. "Stairs," made of books, boxes, and chairs, made each shelf easily accessible.

In the kitchen, he worked hurriedly. There were two cooks busy, who were standing on the stoves, stirring comparatively huge wooden spoons around in those stew pots Perry had not commandeered for water. Wood fires were burning in the pits of the gas-stoves where "spiders," now useless, had been. The smoke was wavering successfully toward the open type of flue used in California.

Perry hurriedly heated some water, filled his hot water bottles. A terrific urgency had grown in him, a need to talk over his mountainous troubles with someone. Wilma Warren, the tiny, golden-haired movie extra whose life he had saved, seemed ideal for the purpose. She would certainly be able to offer him suggestions. Besides, there was something about her, a wonderful, pulse-

hammering femininity, which stirred in Perry emotions long suppressed.

In Fabricus' room, the doctors accepted the hot-water bottles gratefully. They tried to lift them, but found it impossible. Under their direction, Perry placed the bottles between the blankets in which Fabricus was so heavily swathed.

Perry watched the dead white face of Fabricus with a sick anxiety. If it was really pneumonia, Fabricus might die. Or, at the very least, would not be well enough to speak for more than a week.

Wilma was not in the room. Perry went into the corridor, and suddenly heard her voice. He turned the corner eagerly. He stopped dead. Wilma and Barry Fitz-Roy were earnestly engaged in conversation. Wilma's long-lashed eyes were sparkling, but she was blushing, too.

She saw Perry. She excitedly raised her arms, wriggling her fingers in an imperative gesture. Perry obediently lifted her, put her on a luncheon cart.

"Perry!" she squealed. "Mr. Fitz-Roy is going to get me a real part in pictures!"

Fitz-Roy's tiny chest swelled. "Who knows? Some day, she might have the good fortune to play the lead opposite me."

Perry felt hollow. "That would be wonderful," he said. He licked dry lips. "I was wondering, Wilma, if we couldn't talk over some problems. I've promised the people certain things."

"You want me to help you?" She laughed. "What could I do, Perry? You shouldn't have any trouble, since you're the only normal-size person in the city."

"Normal-size?" said Perry, very politely. "Young lady, maybe you'd like to know the truth."

But suddenly he couldn't tell her. He was suddenly humble before her. She was a doll-like creature, with skin that was golden-brown, with the full, tender lips of a thoroughly feminine being. He couldn't very well blame her for wanting to get into the movies when she had the chance. He couldn't blame her for being attracted to Fitz-Roy, either, or for thinking he didn't need help. She trusted him, ascribed to him the powers of a miracle man. Just as other midgets coming to trust him—unduly.

Wilma turned and was deep in conversation with Barry Fitz-Roy even before Perry could go through the formality of excusing himself. He left, vaguely perturbed. He didn't know why the sight of Wilma so interested in Barry should make him bitterly depressed, but it did.

He moved slowly down the hospital corridor. He was vaguely aware that the hospital was functioning more efficiently, was less helpless, as if the presence of water had lubricated it. But there was still a distinct lack of hospital employes. How would Perry get them back on the job? It was impossible. The job was hopeless. He'd do better to curl up and die!

And how would he distribute water as he had promised? It would be sheer nonsense to try emptying the booster-pump of every fire engine in the city.

Fire engines? Perry stopped stock still as the idea burst within him. His face was suddenly transfigured. Why hadn't he thought of that before? Miles upon miles of firehose would become the new water-mains of Hollywood!

And as if the solution to that problem became the trigger which released the solution to others, Perry Wren was ablaze with enthusiasm. Not only did he know how to distribute water, he knew how vital workers could be got back to their jobs! He snapped his fingers in gleeful triumph.

He left the hospital in a full gallop, ran to the middle of the street. He yelled at the top of his voice, drawing midgets toward him from both nearby street intersections. They gathered around him, crying his name. Perry waited until no less than two hundred midgets surrounded him, before speaking.

CHAPTER IV

Perry Organizes a City

IT WOULD be as pointless and boring as it would be endless to recount in detail the historic epic of Perry Wren's mighty achievement in organizing the citizens of Hollywood, the trapped city, into various endeavors which would prolong the life of its desperate population. He had much to work with at the start. The cooperation he received was automatic and wholehearted, and there was no opposition to him as he poured his energies into the task.

No opposition, but much drama! There is drama in a panic-stricken city of people suddenly learning that a guide has come to lead them out of situations which they had believed to be hopeless. There is drama in nurses, doctors, internes, all kinds of hospital workers, firemen, policemen, drug-store owners, grocery store owners and clerks, returning to their jobs, to their places of busi-

ness, in answer to the shouted pleas of the Town Criers.

Town Criers? They were the first step Perry Wren made toward organization. There were two hundred Town Criers delegated by Perry Wren to carry messages of general or specific importance. Those two hundred Town Criers were the new communication system of Hollywood, and Perry was the source of all communication.

Essential workers went back to their jobs. Air raid wardens patrolled their blocks, noting accidents, helping the sick and feeble, preventing or extinguishing fires. Customers used their children's toy wagons or wheelbarrows to carry food, when, a few short hours after those Town Criers spread through the city, grocery stores, food-markets, butcher shops were opened for business.

Clerks stood on cash registers, and rang up totals by striking keys with mighty blows.

Drug store clerks built ladders of boxes, and purveyed their wares by wrestling manfully with boxes and bottles as big and as heavy as themselves.

Ten-cent stores, being for the most part stairless, were opened. Women rushed to buy doll dresses.

Those women who owned the old-type treadle sewing machine made their own dresses with the help of neighbors—one neighbor, or a couple, to work the treadle up and down.

By evening, and in response to Perry Wren's suggestion, distributed through town by means of his Town Criers, midgets had organized "pulley-bucket" systems which enabled them to hoist themselves up to second, third, fourth floor apartments. To navigate three or four flights of stairs, was a job for only the most tireless.

This, however, is only part of the picture. In the two days that followed, Perry Wren became linked with red-painted fire-wagons, roaring thunderously down the streets, midget firemen hanging onto the running boards.

Those midgets laboriously tumbled thousands of feet of two-and-one-half-inch fire-hose from the truck as Perry put on the brakes. And as the truck went roaring up the boulevard, it laid a ribbon of hose behind it.

Those ribbons of hose became the new water mains of Hollywood. They trailed in profusion down from the mountains around Silver Lake Reservoir. They curled away from three laboring pumpers on the lake shores, where eucalyptus and weeping willows stand. Here and there, at intervals of seven-hundred-fifty feet, the gushing water

passed through another gushing booster pump. Friction losses made it necessary to give the water another shove, though it was going downhill.

The swimming pool of the Hollywood High School at Highland and Selma was filled, purified with chlorine. Perry appointed midgets to distribute the water to their fellows who lived in this area.

Other swimming pools were similarly filled, similarly purified.

Where such pools could not be found, Perry set up water-stations at certain street intersections. Water was boiled over wood-fires in the middle of the street, fires which had their own caretakers, who were to keep the fires under rigorous control.

At the end of those two days, fifty pumpers were distributed through the city, part of a vast relay system which boosted water all the way from Echo and MacArthur Parks, and Silver Lake Reservoir.

At these water sources, midget firemen kept constant watch over their chugging pumpers, at times diving beneath the surface, cautiously clearing the gratings at the ends of the intake tubes of weeds which might have clogged them. In this way a steady intake of water, was provided.

Also, they kept the engines' gasoline tanks filled. There were hundreds of automobiles in the vicinity—unusable automobiles. Groups of midgets siphoned gasoline from these, and fed the pumpers. Perry had had no trouble procuring cooperation, and in the back of his mind he experienced profound amazement when he discovered he could obtain it. Midgets volunteered their services by the hundreds. The problem was merely to give them all something to do. Before Perry realized it, a whole new governmental system had grown up around him.

There was the Gasoline Corps, which kept the relay pumpers supplied. There must have been a thousand midgets composing this group, which was, in turn, split up into smaller groups, each group supplying one pumper. Each group was presided over by an experienced fireman, who was answerable to Perry Wren.

There was the Water Supply Corps, similarly subdivided.

AIR raid wardens and policemen comprised other groups. Whatever organizations they had had before the catastrophe was not in existence, and the heads of the groups into which Perry divided them reported to Perry.

Perry had found a half-dozen telegraph

men whom he promptly labeled his Signal Corps. He put these men at six different places at the wall of the dome, gave them ten-cent store hammers—from Woolworth's, which was now operating with a certain degree of efficiency—and told them to start signaling in Morse code to the outside world.

Perry had long since determined the boundaries of this strange new world. The dome which Fabricus had created enclosed a circular section of Los Angeles: Santa Barbara Boulevard to the south, Wilshire Boulevard and Burnside Street to the west, Vermont and Franklin Avenues to the north, the Union Depot to the east.

The circular wall of the dome was as solid, as opaque, as if it were made of some actual substance. It disappeared into the ground, and arched high overhead, slowly losing its opacity, becoming translucent, and then abruptly giving way to the almost completely transparent mother-of-pearl film Perry had noticed before.

So far, there had been absolutely no contact of any kind with the outside world. The dome was certainly miles high, and if airplanes flew overhead, they were invisible.

Nor could Perry's Signal Corps establish contact with the outside world. The wall against which they tapped out their messages seemed to have no elasticity, no capacity for vibration. It was hard, without temperature, and hardly imparted sensation. Whether the wall was thin or thick could not be discovered.

BUT Perry's Signal Corps did note a strange fact. The wall moved back and forth, smoothly but unrhythmically, over a distance of six inches, like a pulsing, palpitating rubber balloon.

"You're sure of that?" Perry demanded incredulously of the Signal Corps man who called it to his attention. "But why should it move in such a fashion?"

The man shrugged. "It does move, though. A sort of gradual, uneven vibration. Might take an hour or two hours, but the wall moves back and forth six inches. Looks as if the whole dome contracts and expands for some reason."

And baffling as the phenomenon was, Perry stubbornly stored it away in the back of his mind. Anyway, he didn't have further time to investigate it then, for Sunset Boulevard had a fire!

The word rang in Perry's exhausted mind like a dreadful gong. He had just finished laying the last hose line, however, and all he had to do was to divert the flow of water

from some pumpers at Sunset and Vine, and from Santa Monica Boulevard.

Handling hoses was another matter! No sooner did the hoses start filling and spouting under high pressure than they began to buck. Fifty or a hundred midgets were powerless to hold those threshing monsters. The hoses became living snakes, wildly, madly lashing, and midgets fled screaming, barely missing death. And for awhile it seemed as if they would never be able to control that fire. The flames were growing and threatened to destroy the whole block.

Perry saved the situation by lashing the hoses to telephone poles in such a manner that the gushing streams of valuable water could be directed on the flames. And as the flames died through that harrowing night, he would move the hoses up another notch, fastening them to some solid object nearer the fire.

The fire was extinguished in the early morning, and Perry's firemen gathered around him, shouting their glee. Perry's throat choked up. These past days he had been acting solely on his nerve. What right had he, the runt everybody made fun of, to take responsibility for a job he wasn't fitted for? But now it was different. Those people, the whole city, respected him loved him!

His lip curled, however. After the dome was gone, and everybody saw how much of a runt he actually was, they'd repudiate him in a hurry. He shuddered, his pity for himself rushing back.

He was a tottering wreck when he showed up at the hospital next day. He had centralized his organization by taking over a senior air raid warden's office on Wilshire. The members of his various bureaus would bring their reports to him there. Perry had managed to obtain only a dozen hours sleep since he had found Fabricus with his back broken. He hadn't seen Wilma at all, and he ached to see her.

His heart sank when the nurses told him about Fabricus. The scientist was worse. A dozen internes had managed to get an oxygen tank into the scientist's room. Fabricus had pneumonia. Fabricus might die! Perry maintained his calmness with effort.

But the hospital was humming. The entire staff had returned. And missing staffs had also reappeared at all other hospitals, Perry learned. His gloom brightened a little. He looked up the superintendent of the hospital, and talked with him on a matter that had been perking in the back of his head.

The hospital superintendent didn't get the idea at first. He was inclined to laugh at

Perry Wren.

"Aw, don't worry, Mr. Wren," he said. "People eat far less than they used to. A carrot or a potato, or a can of beans can feed the average midget family for an entire day, these times. There is no need for you to worry."

But Perry continued to shake his head gloomily.

"You still don't get what I'm driving at," he said to the physician. "Think for a moment. This dome seems to be air tight. Pretty soon sanitary conditions are going to become a problem and the atmosphere is likely to get stale. Our only real hope is Fabricus. He's the one man who can destroy the dome, and he's unconscious most of the time."

THE hospital superintendent turned pale. He chewed nervously on his tiny mustache.

"We'll save Fabricus," he promised. "We'll save him because we've got to. I'll warn my staff and we'll take good care he doesn't die."

"Fine," said Perry Wren. He stared at the doctor. "Now about the food situation. We'll have to put up with the dome for two or three weeks more at least. I think we should find a substitute food, if possible—such as grass. Not long ago I was reading that, under certain conditions, grass can be used as food."

"Grass!" The superintendent shook his head with a quick, protesting motion. "Can't be done without preparation. You see, man can eat grass and digest it, only if a certain cellulose-digesting bacteria are implanted in his intestines—implanted artificially. But it would take us two or three weeks to grow the amount of culture necessary for the first dose. Everybody in Hollywood would have to take several doses, lasting over a period of a month. At the end of that time, we'd be able to eat grass. But by that time—" he stopped awkwardly "—well, by that time we'll certainly be normal again."

But that wasn't what the physician meant. Perry knew what he was thinking, and his heart sank. Naturally, it was impossible. It would take seven or eight weeks before people could live on grass. But the food supply would give out long before then.

He changed the subject, and inquired about Wilma.

The superintendent told him she had left an hour ago. She had made some reference to the Blannery Brothers Motion Picture lot, and Barry Fitz-Roy.

A fit of depression seized Wren. He was too weary to puzzle out how Wilma got to the lot, because it was some distance from here. He threw himself onto an unused bed, staring at the ceiling. Wilma was going Hollywood. He groaned and sank into an uneasy slumber. This time he failed to dream that he was Barry Fitz-Roy. Instead, Perry and Fitz-Roy were fighting, and Perry was altering Fitz-Roy's handsome face in a truly astonishing way.

It was the following day that he understood how Wilma got back and forth from the hospital to the lot. He looked up from his desk in the air raid warden's office that he had taken over. His blood froze. He jumped to his feet with a squawk of unbelief. Coming down the street at quite a respectable pace was a yellow-coated mongrel. And astride the dog's back, guiding it by a bridle was Wilma Warren.

"Wilma!" exclaimed Perry Wren.

Wren was at the curb, yelling the name as the dog came to a stop, with tongue lolling. Wilma lowered herself to the sidewalk.

She giggled. "Nobody else, Perry. And this is Rex. I saw him on the street, with a bunch of other dogs, chasing some midgets. I grabbed Rex and told him how ashamed of him I was. He used to belong to my landlady. Before that, he was a trick dog in a side-show, so he's pretty smart." She nodded her red-gold head pertly.

"And the other dogs didn't hurt you?" Perry said, astonished.

"I guess I was lucky," she admitted. "These dogs were all formerly, pets. They wouldn't hurt anybody. They were just having fun. If the little people had stood up to them, they'd have run with their tails between their legs. It's the curbstone breeds and the naturally bad dogs, the cats and rats that are dangerous."

Perry caressed Rex's ears in wonder. But Wilma's words brought back to mind a menace that Perry had not dealt with yet. The menace from animals who might attack the midgets. How could he overcome that peril? He groaned. At the same time, he remembered he had resolved to treat Wilma coolly. He turned and went back into the office and sat with his chin in his palms.

Sensing his hostility, Wilma followed him. She clambered onto the desk.

"Aw, Perry," she said. "What's the matter?"

He glared at her. "You know what's the matter," he answered. "At a time when everybody should be working for the common good, you have to go Hollywood. I'm

ashamed of you."

"Go Hollywood!" Red spots grew on her cheeks.

"That's it. And you've been making a play for Barry Fitz-Roy."

Her lips opened and closed. She said in a strangled tone, "Perry Wren, I should kick you in the face. I worked eighteen hours straight in the hospital before I ever thought of sleeping. I've worked that long every day. And all I did yesterday was to spend two hours at the Blannery lot taking a screen test. I've—I've got a break at last and I'm taking advantage of it, so there! Miracle Man Maeberle was excited when he saw me. He said I was a natural. He's going to make a midget picture—a real midget picture with real midgets. He says it'll be colossal."

Perry pursed his lips partonizingly. "Without electricity he couldn't make a home movie projector work."

She smiled. "His technicians are using gasoline generators and wiring the whole lot with electricity. It'll work, too. That's the reason they call him Miracle Man Maeberle. So there!"

"Well, all I know is Maeberle's got a lot of nerve trying to make a movie when a whole cityful of lives is at stake." Perry protested angrily.

HE GOT up and walked the length of the room, running his suddenly shaking hand through his hair.

"Maeberle, may be making a picture that no one here will ever live to see, Wilma," he explained. "Fabricus is the only one who can tell us how to destroy the dome—and what if he dies? We'll eventually starve or smother, or die of thirst. At this minute, the only three lakes in the city are being drained. On top of that, the sewage system doesn't work. Disease is going to break out. Typhus. And what are we going to do for fresh vegetables and meat?"

Wilma came to the very edge of the desk, following him with suddenly rounded eyes as he paced.

"But, Perry!" she wailed, all her anger, all her pride in her movie career gone. "You practically told the people everything was going to be all right!"

"Certainly," he bit out. "To stop a panic. To give people hope. To make them cooperate. But I didn't think people would be so optimistic that they'd go on living their lives as if nothing had happened. This is a crisis, Wilma. Just because people have found out how to use wood fires for cooking and how to climb stairs and how to make

clothing and how to carry on with the essential affairs of life doesn't mean they can carry on that way forever. In two or three weeks, if Fabricus doesn't come to, people are going to start dying!"

He threw himself into his chair, chewing at his lip.

"I didn't—realize, Perry," Wilma faltered. "I'll give up my movie career, of course. For awhile, anyway. I want to help. I thought everything was under such marvelous control, but—"

Suddenly her face was animated, her eyes sparkling. Her touch on his hand started his blood to tingling and pulses to hammering as if she were of normal size.

"Perry, I've an idea! I'll be your secretary. They won't need me at the hospital, with all the nurses and people going back to work. You can get a toy desk for me at the Broadway-Hollywood Department Store. I'll keep books. Whenever we take gas from the cars parked alongside all the curbs, we'll leave a credit slip, stating that the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce will pay for the gas. I think the Chamber of Commerce will be glad to pay those bills, because there'll be so much good publicity. We'll prevent counterfeiting by making the slips out in duplicate."

She danced up and down in excitement, while Perry felt the vast load of total responsibility unexpectedly, welcomingly, sliding from his shoulders.

"Your Town Criers, Perry, can ride around on children's tricycles we'll get from department stores. We'll make out credit slips for those, too. And—" her mind was apparently groping with problems Perry hadn't thought of before—"and you can teach midgets to drive cars! One man each for the wheel, for the clutch, for the gear shift, for the brake, for the accelerator—"

"And a coxswain!" Perry suggested, in delight.

"A coxswain," she agreed. "He'll tell everybody what to do at a certain time, like in a racing shell. Wouldn't that make everything run smoother? The hospitals and supermarkets could be kept supplied with food and medicine from warehouses and supply shops."

The words poured out, while Perry watched her in a growing approval and amazement. With Wilma to help him the burden he carried would be made a million times easier. On impulse, he started to do what he had wanted to do ever since he saw her, in spite of her marionette size. He started to kiss her. But she was looking past him, through the plate glass window. Sud-

denly she pointed and screamed.

"Perry! Look!"

Perry looked. His spine tingled with horror. In plain sight on the slightly ragged lawn next to his office a three-inch child was playing. The child was so small that the grass blades must have seemed like a jungle.

Through the grasses of that jungle came a beast of prey—a gray, triangular-nosed beast with a long, fleshy tail.

A normal, full-size rat!

Perry darted from the office, his chair clattering behind him. He raced across the lawn, praying. But he knew he was too late as the white fangs of the disgusting creature gleamed and came together. The rat scuttled away in fright, however, dropping its tiny victim, as Perry yelled.

Revolted by the incident, Perry scooped up the child in quick compassion. He cursed vividly. The fangs had closed on the tiny legs. The child, a girl, was too shocked to scream, though there were long bloody furrows on her limbs.

"Put me on Rex, Perry," said a voice.

Perry turned stupidly but saw immediately what Wilma intended. In another instant, Wilma was holding onto Rex with one arm, cradling the child tenderly with another.

"Giddyap," said Wilma. "Come on, Rex! There's a good dog."

Rex started off, uncertain until he understood in what direction his mistress was directing him. Then he went loping down the boulevard at steady speed toward the hospital and lost himself to Perry's sight.

Perry looked at the blood on his hands. He gritted his teeth. He'd found plenty of evidence that treacherous beasts were rampaging throughout the trapped city. Well, now he was going to do something about it!

CHAPTER V

"Miracle Man" Maeberle

A GAINST his will Perry Wren now became the equivalent of a dictator. Whatever had happened to the actual governmental staff of Los Angeles he didn't find out, but he suspected they must have been outside the enclosed area when the dome went up. At any rate, he never found his authority questioned. His Town Criers constantly went through the town, some on small tricycles, posting placards which Wilma carbon-copied on a typewriter by striking each key one hard blow with her fist.

Perry first waged a campaign to make people wary of animals. Whenever possible, people should band together, present a united front.

Children must at no time be out of their parents' sight or reach.

Windows and doors should be closed during sleeping hours.

Those pets which were loyal to their masters, despite the shocking change in size, should be tied up and fed regularly. Many dogs, for instance, would recognize their masters by smell and not by sight.

Perry grew more pleased when he hit on an idea which reduced the danger from animals still more. He formed the Protector Corps. These were formed of men who owned light derringers, automatics, revolvers, or even air pistols—men who knew how to use those weapons. Perry found several hundred such men, and assigned them certain streets and beats. They were to shoot to kill.

If their weapons were too heavy, they were to fasten them to roller skates Perry provided. They were to stand on the skates so that there would be no danger from the recoil of their monster weapons.

Other admonitions Perry dealt out concerned food and cars. People must not hoard food. When and if the food markets gave out, policemen and air raid wardens would inspect homes for hoarding.

Sugar ration cards must be used, each ticket hereafter good for only a quarter of a pound. Later on, all food might have to be rationed.

Garbage and refuse of all kinds must be deeply buried.

Car owners were to leave their ignition keys in their cars, for the use of Perry's newly formed Motor Corps. Owners would be remunerated later on by the city government for any wear and tear.

At the end of that first week, Perry looked around on a smoothly running city, satisfaction tugging at his heart. He had had two wrecks before the first unit of his Motor Corps moved safely up and down the boulevard, the "coxswain" unhesitatingly giving orders to shift, brake, let out the clutch, accelerate. There were now twenty-five such units. Perry was proud of himself and of his handiwork.

When Barry Fitz-Roy finally put in an appearance, Perry knew that his hero worship of the movie star was entirely gone. But he felt a sharp, hopeless twinge of jealousy when he saw the undisguised interest Wilma gave Barry.

Although thousands of midgets were now clothing themselves in muslin suits of shorts, Fitz-Roy still wore a colorful, Hawaiian-style kerchief.

"Some dump you've got here," Fitz-Roy said appreciatively. "I hear you're doing a pretty good job. Afraid I'm going to have to take your secretary away for a few hours, though, Wren. She passed her screen test."

Wilma squealed in delight. The she faltered. "Oh, oh! Barry, I can't." She looked at Perry, crestfallen, and made a helpless gesture. "We're just too busy. I've got all these credit slips to make out."

Perry stopped her by tenderly picking her up, putting her on his desk. He looked down at her, a little, gorgeous pixie in a flowered gingham dress she had made herself.

He grinned wryly. "Go ahead, Wilma. I've got a little extra time. I'll finish up those credit slips."

Her eyes were pained. "Oh, Perry, I shouldn't. I shouldn't go. You've only been sleeping four and five hours a night as it is."

"Go on," said Perry generously. "You've earned it."

She went almost reluctantly. Perry saw her climb aboard Rex, saw Barry, unused to this astounding means of locomotion, struggling up behind her.

He looked after them. What he had wanted to tell her was that she might just as well have part of her dreams concerning a movie career come true. Because, from what the hospital superintendent had told him, it looked as if Fabricus might be fighting a losing battle. . . .

Three typhoid cases were reported to Perry that afternoon. Together with three midget doctors, he tracked down the source of the infection and destroyed it. But at this very minute, other sources, because of the carelessness of midgets in burying garbage and refuse of all kinds, were being created. The doctors told Perry that in the event of a real typhoid epidemic, the facilities in the city would not be sufficient to handle it.

He arrived back at the office to find that he had company. He had left the door unlocked as usual.

A midget dressed in a perfectly fitted tweed suit was walking up and down the floor in an agony of impatience. He clenched a full-size cigar in his mouth. His hair was a bushy tangle of black ringlets. He was about thirty.

Barry Fitz-Roy was sprawled on Perry's desk. Wilma was not present.

THE midget smoking the cigar stopped pacing.

He glowered.

"Where the devil have you been?" he shouted. "Never mind. You've kept me waiting a whole hour, long enough to dictate a scenario twice as long as 'Gone With the Wind'."

The words poured out in a frenzy, while he waved his cigar.

His voice now dropped to a sudden irritated growl. "Here. Here. Put me up on that desk, sonny."

"Miracle Man Maeberle," Perry thought to himself in some astonishment.

He hesitated between anger and curiosity. He lifted Maeberle. Fitz-Roy hurriedly dropped to the floor.

"Now," said Maeberle. "Now."

His almond-shaped eyes glittered. His throat muscles corded.

"Eeyowerowyarrh!"

It was an eerie, spine-tingling roar that blanched Perry's face.

Maeberle was pleased.

"Think you can make a sound like that?" he shot out.

"Huh? Good heavens! What for?"

As if in answer to this question, Maeberle struck a pose.

"Voice off set, blank screen," he said in a dead monotone. "Our story deals with a rural metropolis where people know no want, no fear, only contentment. There is the village church. Screen lights slowly, montage of village life, organ music in background. There is the pastor's son, Barry Fitz-Roy, a strong, wholesome youth who is courting Wilma Warren, the beautiful choir singer. All is contentment, all is well, until—"

The movie director swelled out his chest, opened his mouth wide.

"Eeyowerowyarrh!"

"Down from the mountains, out of the ghoulish hidden places that man has never explored, comes Perry Wren, the Monster Man!"

The short hairs on Perry's neck stood up.

"You—you mean you want me as the villain of your midget picture?" His voice trembled with incredulity. "The villain?"

Maeberle flooded the air with smoke. "Exactly that, sonny," he said with a broad gesture.

"I don't think much of your movie, Mr. Maeberle," Perry said faintly. "The picture wouldn't be true to life. You see, you've got a giant picking on midgets. It—well, it just doesn't happen that way. In true life, the giant would be friendly. He'd want to help the midgets. I know, because I happen to be—er—a giant."

"And since when do I have to make a picture that's true to life?"

"Since when do you have a right making a picture at all, going ahead with your business as if nothing else matters?" Perry demanded with sudden blazing bitterness. "They call you a miracle man. Well, maybe you'd better apply your talents to helping the people of this city. Grow me a crop of lettuce in a week. Find me a new source of water to replace the lakes we're draining now. Find some way to get fresh meat."

"And give up my wonderful art?" Maeberle screeched. He came to the edge of the desk. "You—you mean to tell me you're refusing this part in my movie, you ingrate?"

"That's what I mean! I haven't the time. I'm too busy. Now get out!"

"You upstart!" Maeberle jumped agilely to the floor. He shook his fist. "I'll have you blacklisted in every studio in Hollywood. Come on, Barry."

Perry held the door open for them, and gaped as he saw the two midgets cross the street and climb aboard a two-wheeled roller-skate.

The skate was attached to the leather harness around the neck of a brindle bulldog.

Maeberle flicked the reins, standing up like a charioteer, while Barry Fitz-Roy sat down and hung on. The bulldog went loping away.

Perry gaped. Miracle Man Maeberle, they called him, and no wonder!

Five minutes later, Wilma Warren came charging into the office on the back of her fantastic, golden-haired mount.

"Perry!" she cried excitedly. "Fabricus is better! He's conscious. I've just come from the hospital. Dr. Fabricus has passed the crisis! In a few days, you'll be able to talk to him."

Four days later Perry Wren was standing at the bedside of the only full-sized human in Hollywood beside himself.

Fabricus was flat on his back, his dark brows drawn down in a sardonic, bitter scowl. But he gripped Perry's hand fervently.

"They tell me you've been doing great things, lad." His eyes shifted and dropped hopelessly. "Hang it all, it's a good thing you saw that light in my place."

"Don't blame yourself for it, sir," Perry begged. "It just wasn't anybody's fault."

Fabricus waved his protestations aside. "They tell me the outside world communicated with us yesterday."

"Communicated?" Perry laughed grimly. "Worse than useless. A one-sided communication. There's no way for us to answer them. And apparently they can't help us."

HE FELL into a momentary silence. Yes, the outside world had at last established contact. Perry himself had seen the sky-writing laid a mile high, athwart the sky by a lone, invisible plane—invisible because it was so far above the dome.

"We are trying to help." So the message had run, and it had filled Perry with the wild fire of hope. The trapped people of Hollywood had gone mad at the sight. It was proof that they were not forgotten, that there actually were other people in the world—people who had the fate of the trapped city in mind.

But after that first surge of hope, Perry had known disillusionment.

"What good is it?" he now asked Fabricus. "For two weeks they've had the brains and tools of a whole world at their disposal. If they haven't discovered how to destroy the dome by this time, it means that more days and weeks will pass before they even come near the solution. And the water supply won't last even three weeks more. That means the end of everybody here."

He told Fabricus about the wall of the dome where it touched the ground, told him that his Morse code men had discovered—that the dome contracted and expanded by the minute amount of six inches. Fabricus shook his head blankly. He could not explain it.

But he could answer other questions which had puzzled Perry.

Fabricus and Perry themselves had been spared the size-reduction because the force-dome generator had created extremely long wave-lengths of energy. The two men had been inclosed within a sphere around the machine, the radius of which was one wave-length—a null and void zone which was neither negative nor positive.

There had been no "beat"—or pulsation—which is caused when the trough and crest of two wave-lengths coincide. The people outside that radius, on the other hand, had been subjected to the full force of a recurring series of beats.

An analogy for this is found in the fact that when one is within a certain number of feet of an echoing surface, there is no echo. The sound-wave, being a wave-length measured in feet, incloses the person who attempts to produce the echo.

"But why weren't we affected when we left the warehouse?"

"There was a secondary radiation or field which was present in its full intensity when the dome was created—perhaps only for a fraction of a second. This secondary radia-

tion was the reduction-field. After the dome was up, the secondary radiation subsided in intensity. It was no longer powerful enough to reduce us in size.

"As to how that secondary field brought about such a fantastic size-reduction—well, I think I've got the answer to that one, too. And a peculiar answer it is. Perry, I think I've proved that man has a soul!"

Perry had vaguely considered that possibility, but he said nothing now.

"Why didn't that secondary radiation effect other animals—dogs, cats, horses, rats, cattle—as it did man?" Fabricus went on. "To find the answer, one must first discover in what way animals differ from man. Physically they are the same, or practically the same. Mentally, a man is more highly advanced, but the structure of the brain is about the same. Spiritually—there lies the difference! The psyche. The soul. The one attribute which most religions agree man possess but animals do not."

"Then the secondary radiation didn't act on the body at all?"

"Well, not exactly. The secondary radiation didn't act directly on the body. It had to pass through the psyche before it acquired its peculiar power to shrink electronic orbits, thus reducing thousands of bodies in size. The psyche in this case acted as a sort of electro-magnetic catalyst which changed the secondary radiation so that it was able to accomplish the size-reduction."

Perry listened, enthralled, to an outer, unexpected proof that man truly possessed a soul.

Fabricus was able to answer another question, also. Why was the wall of the dome nearest the ground completely opaque? Because the stress-fields which composed the dome were polarized in the direction of gravity. At the base of the dome, therefore, light was unable to get through, because it was going "against the grain." As the wall curved toward the apex of the dome, greater amounts of light filtered through, because the light was shining downward "through the grain."

Perry arose, his face suddenly gloomy. Fabricus had advanced no theory which might be put into operation to destroy the dome.

He shook the older man's hand, an unvoiced question in his eyes.

Fabricus flushed painfully.

"I'll try, lad," he said huskily.

But after Perry had gone, he sadly shook his head. His expression was one of hopelessness.

CHAPTER VI

A Reluctant Monster

FOR several days, now, Wilma Warren had been at the Blannery Lots, working four and five hours a day. Perry had nothing to complain about, since Wilma worked as his secretary for ten and twelve hours each day. To a certain degree, the studio work was her recreation, though she was obviously tiring. But, try to avoid it though he would, a hostility grew up between him and Wilma. She knew of his refusal to play the part of the Monster Man.

"I'm going to the studio this afternoon," she had told Perry one day. "They're doing some mob scenes for the picture."

"What picture?"

"The midget picture."

Perry marveled. "Maeberle is going ahead with it, anyway?"

Wilma ran through the reports and expense accounts that Perry had piled up on her desk—typewriter size sheets that to her were twice as big as newspapers.

She answered him without looking up. "They're going ahead with it. Maeberle has gathered together all the extras, actors, actresses, make-up men, sound-effects men, camera-grinders, and movie stagehands he can find. He's going to pay them big money and he's buying their food and supplying them with water. He's got about two hundred, maybe three hundred people living right on the lot. Maeberle's doing all the scenes except the ones you're supposed to be in."

She bit at her lip. She stood on her desk, a tiny, beautifully shaped little mannequin, and began to punch at a portable typewriter that had legal type, one blow for each key.

Perry chose to remain in a state of polite surprise. "Wonderful. The script is already written?"

"Maeberle wrote it."

"And Maeberle is producing it?"

"And directing it, too."

Perry frowned. "Does he act in it?"

"He plays the part of the pastor."

"Who puts the make-up on?"

"Maeberle does some of that."

Then she saw the patronizing way he was looking at her. She spoke through her teeth, almost inarticulately. "Just because I've got a chance at the career I've always wanted, Perry Wren, you accuse me of going Hollywood. If I were letting down on my job

here, it would be different. But I'm not. And it isn't as if Maeberle shouldn't be making a picture. You, yourself, told me you've got so many of the people offering their services that you can't give them all jobs."

Perry protested. "I don't object."

"You don't object," she flared. "But if you don't accept Maeberle's screen offer, the whole picture will be impossible. After dreaming about a movie career all my life, Perry Wren, it isn't nice to see my bubble pricked!" She sniffed. But all Perry could do was to shake his head, helplessly. To him it seemed apparent Wilma Warren disliked him. Or, at the very least, she liked Fitz-Roy better.

Miracle Man Maeberle again approached Perry.

"Five thousand a week," he said desperately. "And a bonus of ten thousand after the picture is released. You can't refuse me. It's a set-up. Natural midgets and a natural giant. We don't have to fake. It'll never happen again in a million years."

Perry firmly—and urgently—shooed him away.

The next day, Perry was busy studying a map of the inclosed city. He had little "x" marks at certain places, marking empty food warehouses. There were too many of those "x" marks.

Nor was this the only sign that events were coming to a head. MacArthur and Echo Lakes were being pumped away. Silver Lake Reservoir was still appreciably full, but it was now taking the brunt of the burden.

There was one more source of water which Perry had finally tapped. These were the water-mains below the city streets. Perry had held a consultation with a dozen midget fire-chiefs. The result of this was that auxiliary pressure pumps were now forcing water from the mains through fire hydrants. This water, being fresh, supplied hospitals exclusively.

Perry sat there, studying the map, but something was perking in the back of his head. Something that bothered him. He uneasily walked the length of the room, hands behind his back.

What was it? And suddenly a phrase that Wilma had spoken came to him:

"It isn't nice to see my bubble pricked!"

A—bubble!

He snapped his fingers in elation. Fifteen minutes later, he was standing over Fabricus, rapt and excited over a discovery so tremendous in import that it was a practical cinch that it would lead to the clue Fabricus needed to formulate the theory by which the dome

could be destroyed.

"A bubble!" he cried. "That's what the dome is, sir. And I've all the proof I need."

WREN swept the curtains aside. Fabricus, still on his back, still splinted immovably from head to toe, could see the transparent apex of the dome. It shifted with subtle, mother-of-pearl colors.

"You've seen soap bubbles shifting with those same colors," Perry said tensely. "The light is refracted like in a prism. The film that forms the bubble in this case is somewhere between a liquid and a solid and a magnetic field. It responds to molecular forces. Surface tension, an electro-magnetic surface tension, holds it together.

"And like a smaller bubble, this bubble that incloses Hollywood, expands and contracts with each change in atmospheric pressure. If the atmospheric pressure outside the dome drops, the pressure inside the dome causes the dome to expand, and vice versa. You see how it tallies, sir?"

"Perfect!" Fabricus exclaimed in some astonishment. He pursed his mobile lips and nodded his head pertly. "Hang me, you've got it! And your idea is, of course, is the obvious one."

"To prick the bubble!" cried Fabricus.

Yes, a bubble overlay Hollywood. Except in size, it was the same as a smaller, everyday bubble. It was held together by a surface tension that was mostly electro-magnetic.

There was a surface film, however, that even cannon balls could not destroy, for they would merely bounce off that incredibly tough and thick film. Fabricus had designed it to resist mere molecular forces. How, then, could the bubble be pricked, exploded? What tool could be used?

It was Fabricus, of course, who eventually solved the problem. One fought fire with fire. If the bubble was held together by an electro-magnetic surface tension, an electro-magnetic, interfering vibration would cancel out that surface tension, and create a puncture in that tough, surface film. Once a portion of the dome was destroyed, the surface tension that held it stretched in shape would cause its disappearance, in an instant. Like a soap bubble vanishes.

Perry sat at Fabricus' bedside for long hours during the next two days. He worked with T-square, drawing board, triangles, drafting pen, and French curves, drawing up the plans for the machine from sketches Fabricus made. Now and again, Fabricus gave him notations on dimensions, on voltages and am-

perages, correcting him when he placed a positive sign where a minus should be.

Fabricus checked over the completed plans, his peculiarly mobile lips stretched in a smile of delighted satisfaction.

"Now, have the machine made," he cried. "It will do the job."

Have the machine made!

Perry Wren sat at his desk, later on, and looked blankly at the plans. They were complex. They required an assortment of condensers, tubes, three-way wires, copper and silver ball electrodes—all parts which would be hard to find in a small city, particularly since the war had made such parts scarce. But he had to have those parts!

He sent runners out, with orders to track down the needed parts from radio repair and supply shops. At the end of twenty-four hours, a meager percentage of those parts had been found.

THIS frightened him. It was incredible that the method of deliverance should be found, only to discover that the method could not be put into operation. In a frenzy, he himself drove through the city, searching through supply houses, warehouses, department stores. Failure.

He found Wilma Warren and Barry Fitz-Roy waiting for him. Wilma's dog, Rex, was sitting on his haunches and panting.

Fitz-Roy looked a little seedy. It was apparent that the jungle darling of every red-blooded woman in the nation was having a hard time roughing it.

"I was looking for the expense accounts of the I. Magnon and Bullock's-Wilshire department stores, Perry," Wilma said.

Perry reached into a drawer and put the sheets on her toy desk. She stood on the desk and used both hands to roll a sheet of tying paper into the typewriter.

Perry sat down miserably, his hands between his knees.

Fitz-Roy was leaning on the edge of Wilma's desk, scowling.

"Something eating you?" he demanded sarcastically. "It should." His voice was bitter. "You're ruining our picture."

"Your picture won't be much good, Fitz-Roy, because everybody's going to die before it's finished," Perry said.

And suddenly he found himself blurting out the story of his failure, the words tumbling. He had the plans for the machine that would destroy the dome, but no means to make the machine.

Wilma stopped typing. Her interest changed to a glowing excitement. Fitz-Roy

was heedless, at first. Then his expression changed to one of triumphant cunning.

"Miracle Man Maeberle!" they cried at the same time.

Perry gasped. Of course!

"But—but do you think he's miracle man enough for that?" he demanded, jumping excitedly to his feet.

"Maeberle," Fitz-Roy informed him eagerly, "can do anything!"

Perry's eyes glistened. He grabbed the plans from the desk and started for the door. "Come on! We'll give him a chance to prove how much of a miracle man he is."

Maeberle sat with his feet elevated on his toy desk. He was smoking a five-inch cigar. He regarded Perry with cunning. He had been talking for five minutes, the main theme being that he could do anything.

"You'll make the bubble-pricking machine for me then?" Perry demanded eagerly.

"Sure," said Maeberle. "Sure. I'll make it in record time. Leave it to me." He arose, his shaggy black brows drawing over suddenly cunning eyes. "And now, sonny," he said maliciously, "I got a favor to ask you."

He drew himself to his full height, which wasn't much.

"Eeyowerowyarrh!"

Maeberle blew greenish smoke upward. "How about it, sonny? Think you can make a sound like that?" He grinned cagily.

Perry's shoulders fell. He knew when he was licked. He understood perfectly the only conditions under which Maeberle would assemble the vital machinery.

He drew air into his lungs, made a cavern of his mouth, and gave it everything he had.

"Eeyowerowyarrh!"

CHAPTER VII

Desperate Chances

ROARING with rage, Perry Wren was a monster man, charging down on a peaceful rural metropolis, out of the ghoulish hidden places of the Adirondacks. Save for a G-string, he was naked. He trampled on men, women, and children alike. His particular goal was Wilma Warren. He loved Wilma Warren, but nobody knew that, particularly Barry Fitz-Roy.

Barry Fitz-Roy, his home trampled to ruins beneath the monster's feet, his mother and father mercilessly slain by this ravaging, soulless beast, now crept through the

countryside, on the trail of Perry Wren. Perry Wren was holding Wilma Warren in his filthy hands, making mumbling sounds of adoration, but Wilma Warren thought he was going to eat her. She screamed, and the scream was duly recorded on the sound track. Barry Fitz-Roy heard the scream, turning his profile at the correct angle to the hand-operated cameras, and was off, his chin jutting with determination.

Perry Wren brought Wilma Warren closer and closer to his shaggy lips. . . .

"Cut!"

Maeberle all but tore out his black ringlets. "That ain't any way to look ferocious. Can't you drool?"

Perry felt faint and carefully set down Wilma.

"I've been trying to drool for a week," he said to Maeberle. "I'm sick of it. This is the twelfth retake on this scene. Those Kliegs are hurting my eyes. I've got more important things to do than act like an idiot. I've got to string some hose lines. The water mains have given out and the hospitals are begging me for more water. Typhoid broke in the La Brea district last night and I have to track down the source of the infection, or else we'll have a typhoid plague on our hands. I'm sick of this."

"Hold it!" Maeberle snapped. He licked thick lips. His tone became wheedling. "Just once more, Perry," he begged. "This is the high point of the picture."

"How far have you progressed with the machine?" Perry said in the same volcanic tone.

Maeberle's eyes flickered. "Gimme three more days," he pleaded. "I'll deliver the finished article to you." He sent an appealing glance at Wilma, desperately.

Wilma's lovely face was strained with fatigue.

"Please, Perry," she said quietly.

Perry wearily trudged back to the papier-maché trees, screwed his beard-matted face into a hideous, lustful pattern and with beady eyes watched Wilma Warren, innocently sitting on the bank of a meandering stream, dangling her bare legs in the water. The cameras ground. The microphones picked up the twittering of birds produced by the sound-effects man. The Klieg lights overhung the scene. Maeberle had, as was usual with him, done the impossible. Somewhere he had found gasoline generators. The Blannery Bros. Motion Pictures lot was powered with gasoline-generated electricity.

"Eeyowerowyarrh!" said Perry, blunder-

ing into the clearing toward Wilma, and drooling. . . .

Two days later, Perry Wren had drained the last of the water from Silver and Echo Lakes into McArthur Lake. "We can do without food for a few days, maybe," he told himself, numbly. "But men can't live long without water."

The warehouses, super-markets, chain stores and independents were depleted. Perry had sent out air raid wardens to track down possible hoarders, with only mediocre results. Famine also, was on its way.

Fabricus' sharp eyes looked up at Perry's thinning face.

"You shouldn't deprive yourself of food," he said grimly.

"I feel that I have to. I can do without it. These midgets are my responsibility."

Fabricus studied him. His lined face suddenly grew gentle.

"You've changed since that night you came into my laboratory, Perry," he said.

"How so?"

"You were what is commonly known as a sourpuss—because of your size."

Perry flushed. "Maybe I was," he said stiffly. "How could I help but change? I'm big and they're little. After the dome is destroyed—if it is destroyed—" He stopped, appalled. "Everybody will go back to his original height," he said huskily. His eyes dropped.

"Of course. But that won't make any difference in you. You've learned something you won't forget. You'll discover that for yourself."

Perry changed the subject. He bitterly poured into Fabricus' ears the true state of affairs. Maeberle had made good progress on the machine that would prick the bubble, but it still wasn't finished. The only favorable event of the last week was that Perry had finished his scenes in the midget picture. He had fulfilled his bargain with Maeberle.

Perry also had seen skywriting in the sky over the dome almost daily, but this news from the outside world was not favorable. They were trying to destroy the dome. They were failing. They had confessed they weren't even near a solution.

"We can't count on them for any help," said Perry. "We have to wait for Maeberle."

HE GOT thinner in the next few days, but everybody else got thinner too. A terrible, unhealthy restlessness was growing among the people. He tried to keep the city organized, but that organization seemed falling to pieces.

There was a vitamin deficiency, for the city had long been without fresh vegetables.

Walking down the quieting streets, Perry heard the chilling cry of unfed, thirsty children.

Food and water were being thinly and carefully rationed.

He walked vaguely, unable to concentrate. Concentrate on what? In his heart, he had been proud of himself. Now the thought of all he had done was ashes on his tongue. All that was for nothing.

The hospitals were filling up.

Perry feverishly wished he could take over a hospital bed himself and feel free of responsibility.

Wilma worked as usual. And if there didn't happen to be a Town Crier around to take a message, she herself would climb on Rex, and take the message.

Perry was aware that something was on her mind. She couldn't meet his eyes. But he knew he was in love with Wilma, four feet smaller than he. He liked everything about her, and she stirred a yearning he found difficult to hide.

That she looked upon him as anything except a Monster Man was doubtful, though. She doubtless loved Barry Fitz-Roy. Barry Fitz-Roy was not thin. He was muscular and healthy.

Nor did Maeberle seem affected by the famine.

"Sure," he boasted. "We live on our art. The machine? It ain't finished yet, Perry."

He smashed his fist temptuously into his palm.

"It's driving me crazy!" I got my technicians working on it. They've scoured the city for some silver electrodes. So now I've had them busy melting down some silver candlesticks my great aunt gave me. I'll deduct them from your salary."

Perry turned helplessly away, not knowing what to say or do.

And then the dam of events broke—with an appalling rush!

One evening Perry heard the knocking on the door of his room above the office. It was the middle of the night. He tumbled groggily from the bed.

A tiny midget figure—Wilma—came into the room, her red-gold hair bathed with silver moonlight.

Perry lifted her to an end table, masking his astonishment.

"Perry—" Wilma began. She gulped. "Just how bad is the situation?"

Perry marshaled the ghastly, torturing facts. There was simply no more water left

in Hollywood. Perry had tried drilling for arterial wells, but the proper equipment could not be found. The people had been without food for two days. There were a half-hundred typhoid patients in the hospitals.

He related these facts with a certain bitter relish. "Maeberle promised me the bubble-piercing machine for yesterday. But it isn't finished."

Wilma's hands began to twist together, and tears ran down her cheeks.

"That terrible, terrible man," she sobbed. "He's been putting you off. He's been putting everybody off. He and Barry Fitz-Roy have a whole supply of water and food in an air-raid shelter Maeberle built on the lot last year, Barry Fitz-Roy told me yesterday, when I asked him point-blank why he and Maeberle were never hungry. He told me about the food and water and then he blurted out that the machine for destroying the dome was finished."

"Finished!" Perry shouted the word out at the top of his voice.

"Barry must have felt a little ashamed, and he wanted to share the blame of knowing about it with someone else. I didn't let him know how I felt about the whole thing, but as soon as I could get away, I came here. Perry, the machine's been finished for a whole week."

The words poured from her in a flood, while Perry's face went slowly grim. Maeberle didn't want the dome destroyed until the picture was finished, because then he would no longer have midgets to make the movies. Perry winced at his own stupidity for not suspecting that before.

He made up his mind quickly. He scooped Wilma up in one arm. There was work to do—now!

As his station wagon came to a screeching stop, Perry was out of it, and walking rapidly toward the entrance to the Blannery lot. It was early morning. The sky was pitch black. The spiked steel gates stretching between the 'dobe walls were locked. Far up at the other end of the lot, Perry saw the bright glare of Kleig lights, saw hundreds of midgets—actresses, actors, brawny stage carpenters, extras. Maeberle was going ahead full blast, shooting a mob scene, to judge by the thudding roar of midget voices.

Perry shook the gate and yelled.

A MIDGET, the regular gatekeeper, came out of the shadows and stood looking at Perry. In his hand he was hold-

ing a tiny, light-weight Derringer.

He was pointing the gun at Perry.

"I got orders to keep you out of here, Perry," he said menacingly.

Something exploded with a puff of red light in Perry's brain. He turned, got into the station wagon. He drove up the street a block and a half and honked his horn savagely. Windows opened. Perry beckoned and commanded.

Within five minutes, he was surrounded by a group of forty or fifty midgets. And after Perry, in terse, raging sentences, had explained the situation, that group grew, a group that was ugly with violent intentions. There were two hundred midgets, and more coming in every second. They waved every conceivable kind of weapon. Table forks and knives, drumsticks, long darning needles, scissors, rubber bands and paper wads, long, sharp-heeled women's shoes, marbles, electric light bulbs, leather belts, lengths of heavy cord, coat hangers—anything and everything which they were strong enough and big enough to use with damaging effect.

In addition, they had brought along a half-dozen ladders with which to storm the walls. The rungs were so far apart, true, that the midgets would have had to shinny up the legs of the ladder most of the way, but there was no substitute which would serve the purpose as well.

Perry looked over the assemblage with suddenly misted eyes. These midgets loved him, depended on him. They didn't know he was a runt, that he was only five feet tall. Later on, they'd realize it, and they'd feel embarrassed that they'd had to depend on a pipsqueak. But that was neither here nor there.

"You know what to do," he said. "Just follow after me. And be sure your clothing is loose, so it won't strangle you when you return to normal size."

He crossed to the station wagon. He stuck his gigantic head in and kissed Wilma. This was the end, in a way. An episode was drawing to a close, his power would soon be over. He would be a runt again.

If the machine worked!

"Stay here, Wilma," said Perry.

The command was brusque, to cover his sudden sloppy sentimentality. But Wilma Warren smiled gloriously. She quickly made a gesture and when he stooped down, she kissed him again.

"That's for you, Perry Wren!"

Perry turned, waved his "army" after him. A few minutes later, the ladders were set

against the walls, the midgets were struggling upward. Perry waiting until most of his midgets were on top the wall, then he went up two rungs at a time.

A blasting yell rang out from a loud speaker as he reached the top.

"Get down off there! Git! Mr. Maeberle! It's that Perry Wren!"

A shot blasted out. Something hummed past his ear. He lost his temper. The first thing he could think to say was: "Eeyowero-wyarrh!"

Perry Wren, the Monster Man, coming from the wilds of Hollywood to plunder and destroy a motion picture lot!

Perry hung from the wall, dropped. He turned, just as Maeberle began to bellow at the top of his voice. Perry saw a wave of midgets swarming toward him as he ran ahead. A sudden rain of small missiles showered over him. He grinned savagely, put one arm in front of his eyes, and plowed into the thick of the incredible horde. He got about halfway through when something pulled his legs from under him.

The midgets swarmed over him, panting and cursing, and kicking him in the face.

"It didn't happen like this in the picture," he thought in some astonishment.

He rolled over with a ponderous effort, and heard some midgets scream. Briefly, he caught a tableau of his fighters coming down the wall. Since the jump would have been too steep, they had managed to draw one of the lighter ladders over and let it down inside the wall. They were coming in pell-mell, waving their needles and kitchen forks and jabbing with them. They were tangling with the midgets at the base of the ladder.

Perry got to his feet again, and was pulled down again. He laboriously picked midgets off his arms and ankles and went on.

"Eeyowero-wyarrh!" he yelled.

He charged toward Maeberle's offices in a stuccoed 'dobe building behind a New York street set. Maybe the machine was there.

Perry heard Maeberle, screaming. "Keep him away from there. Tie him up. Kill him. Everybody gets a five-hundred dollar War Bond if he's stopped. Remember your country!"

Perry did a high jump over a band of midgets and left his interference to mop up. Elatedly, he reached the door of Maeberle's office. He suddenly strangled as a midget leaped on him from behind. Two more pulled in opposite directions on his legs.

THEY were trying hard for their War Bonds, their intention, apparently, being

to pin him down like Gulliver.

"Patriotic!" Perry thought bitterly. He shook the midget off his back, grabbed at the hair of the other two. They screamed and let go and Perry went inside. He whirled in a circle, saw nothing that conceivably could have been the machine he sought.

Something tugged at his trouser cuffs. He turned.

"Wilma! How'd you get there?"

"It's a good thing I came," she retorted. "The machine's in here."

She hurriedly led him into the farthest office, and thrust aside drapes from a windowless alcove.

Perry's breath stopped as he looked at the machinery.

It was a patchwork. It was balanced on a scarred, wheeled metal table. The copper and silver ball electrodes canted at the wrong angle, the condensers had been filched from an ancient model radio, as had the de Forest tubes sprinkled through the machine.

The gasoline generator and transformer were hooked firmly to the middle shelf of the table, but the instrument board, replete with rheostat and amplifier, hung to the body of the apparatus by a complex of tangled, insulated wires.

Wilma saw his stricken expression. "Don't back down now, Perry," she begged. "It will work. No matter how bad it looks. Maeberle can do anything. You see, he was planning to save himself and his friends, if things got too bad."

"Never mind," said Perry, grimly.

He grabbed the edge of the table and rolled it shakily to the outer door.

Outside, midgets were yelling and screaming. Perry's men were stretched out in a line three and four deep, protecting the doorway. Maeberle was in the rear of his employees, urging them on frantically. The combatants were going at it with sticks, fists, stones. They were kicking, gouging, rolling on the ground and pounding each other's heads.

Beyond this battle scene, midgets, several scores of them, were lying crumpled motionless; or in some cases, squirming feebly.

At three different places on the walls, Perry saw midgets operating cameras. The cameras were whirring, and were apparently mounted on roller skates. Maeberle, Perry thought, would probably have cameras at his own death-scene.

He pulled the machine over the threshold and onto the dusty compound, while Wilma scampered excitedly around him. The interfering vibration would not work through solid walls. Instead of spearing toward the

apex of the dome, it would be shorted back to the ground.

Two of Maeberle's desperately battling midgets got through. They had War Bond fever written all over them. Perry picked them up and tossed them back where they came from.

He started the generator, which roared and shook the table in such a manner that it was plain the vibration would shortly shake the whole machine apart. Perry's face whitened. The tubes slowly awoke to life, flickered. The apparatus was working on direct current.

The sighting mechanism of Maeberle's odd creation consisted of a shiny stove pipe, with two lenses inserted at either end. It balanced itself on a knife edge. Perry rotated the sighter until it would channel the burst of live power which should erupt from the secondary coils—should erupt, but very likely wouldn't. Not from this patchwork.

"Watch out!" Wilma screamed.

Perry looked up in time to see a bronzed, lithe figure clad in a flowery bandanna handkerchief launch itself from the eaves of the roof overhead. Fitz-Roy's long hair flowed backward in the wind of his flight. Fitz-Roy was Tarzan, flinging himself from a treetop to battle with Perry Wren, the Monster Man. At least, that was the picture flowing through Perry's brain. And nobody, not even a monster man, could stand up against Tarzan. Not even Perry Wren. Or could he?

At the last second, a strangled cry leaped from his throat. Fitz-Roy's purpose was to upset the machine. Perry's hands shot forward, wrapped around Fitz-Roy's waist. Fitz-Roy stopped in his flight, his powerful little legs futilely lashing.

Perry began to squeeze. Fitz-Roy's eyes popped. Mortal fright crossed his face.

"Please!" he screamed. "I won't do it again. I promise. Leggo!"

PERRY gently set him down. Fitz-Roy ran with a whimper. Perry looked after him blankly, and then turned back to the machine. It was set. He was ready to flip the tab. The interfering vibration would lance out toward the roof of the bubble. If the machine worked, of course. Then why didn't he flip the tab? A terrible, clammy agony took hold of him.

He was afraid the machine would work!

He closed his eyes while perspiration bathed him, while the battle continued with unrelenting fury around him. His thoughts revolted him. For the last four weeks, he had been great, famous, a beloved tyrant ruling his people wisely and well, laughing

and suffering when they laughed and suffered. Now he was to destroy all that, to lose his kingdom, his greatness. He would be a runt again.

An outrageous thought came whispering to him deep from the dark cellars of his mind.

"I'll accidentally topple the machine."

"Perry!" Wilma's cry was a wail. "Please hurry! They're breaking through!"

They were breaking through! Maeberle's midgets, well fed, well paid, and with a War Bond to spur them on, were forcing a way toward him.

Perry saw his own fighters, battling tooth and nail.

"They trust me," he thought. "No matter what happens to me, I can't go back on them."

He turned toward the machine with a groan of pain. His hand darted out. He flipped the tab which sent current through the electrodes.

There was one breathless moment of inaction. Then silver fire rippled through the machine, an aura of flame enclosing it in molten beauty—and abruptly the machine burst apart.

It exploded!

Perry cowered back from that terrifying spectacle. But not without undergoing a pounding, joyous sensation of triumph. Just before the explosion, a cylindrical flare of sparkling incandescence had speared upward through the sky like a green sword—up through the sky toward the apex of the dome.

CHAPTER VIII

From the Ashes of the Old

QUICK as a flash, around Perry, an astounding miracle took place. People sprang magically to towering sizes, normal sizes!

He heard gurgled cries of men suddenly being throttled by their own constricting clothing. They roared, screamed. And those who were fortunate enough not to be choked into unconsciousness ripped their clothing from their bodies.

The fighting had stopped. Perry stood for a long moment, looking at the machine that Maeberle had built. Miracle Man Maeberle! The machine was a fantastic mass of molten steel and glass and tangled wires. But it had accomplished its purpose.

The dome was gone!

Looking at the madhouse that was being enacted around him, Perry was glad that part of his instructions to his midgets before they had swarmed over the wall had been to loosen their clothing.

"Okay, Perry." The voice crackled with excitement. "What next?"

Perry turned and recognized one of his midgets. Only he was no longer a midget. He was a six-footer.

Others of his men came crowding around. Orders poured from Perry's lips from force of long habit.

"Rip the clothing off all those people," he commanded. He gestured to those who were twitching on the ground, their faces turning blue. Among these, some distance away, were actresses and extra girls who had not, naturally, participated in the conflict. They had been wearing stiff, starched clothing which Maeberle had had made for this picture.

Those men who had been in the battle Perry left where they were. They were in a state of shock, with broken heads and arms, from cruelly blackened eyes and bruised bodies.

"Get blankets," Perry snapped. "All you can find. Wrap these people up. Hurry!"

He entirely forgot Wilma, in the necessity of bringing order out of chaos. He forgot Maeberle—until suddenly a half dozen of Wren's men appeared, dragging Maeberle along the compound. Maeberle was struggling, swearing furiously.

One of the men holding him spoke murderously.

"We'll see what Perry Wren has to say about you, you rat."

A lump grew in Perry's throat. He blinked and lowered his head, to keep these men, these six-footers, from seeing the sudden mist in his eyes. He thought in awe:

"Size doesn't seem to make any difference. They took orders from me and they didn't even notice I was a runt—or they didn't attach any importance to it. To them, I'm still their leader, and now they're bringing Maeberle to me for judgment."

Maeberle shook himself free with a roar.

"What's the meaning of this? I'm not sore at you any more, Perry. We've succeeded! What an 'epicture!'" His sweating face glowed with pride. He drew a tattered remnant of his clothing around his body. "That scene where you let go with a blast of green flame from the machine—I'll write that into the script, see? We've got a hit. Wilma Warren will be a national sensation."

"Here goes," Perry muttered. Although Maeberle was some six feet two as he stood,

Perry took no time to compute relative sizes. His fist crescendoed all the way from his ankles. It was thunder and lightning when it hit Maeberle's battleship jaw.

Maeberle's expression turned stupid. He tottered. He whirled in stick-like fashion; and then folded up like a string.

Perry looked down at the twitching body, swallowing. Had he, the runt, actually done that?

"Airplane!"

Somebody yelled the word. Perry looked upward, saw the red and green tail-lights of the craft as it swooped low. The pilot throttled the engine in a series of excited, coughing beats.

A GLAD pulse started beating in Perry's body. Contact with the outside had been made. Power, food, water would start pouring in. The menace was over.

Perry suddenly found himself in the middle of a crowd of his men. They were laughing, excited. Now that the adventure was over, they were reviewing its more ludicrous aspects with chuckling intonations. Perry started to elbow his way through, but somebody suddenly grabbed him. There was a whirling moment when he didn't know what was happening. Then he found himself on somebody's shoulders, elevated high above the crowd. A roar of joyous laughter swept the compound as Perry blinked. Somebody started a song, and everybody else took it up:

"For he's a jolly good fellow—"

He sat there while the stirring homage rang out, his thoughts in turmoil. He remembered the last weeks, when he had been a giant and they had been runts. He had sympathized, tried to help them when he could have lorded it over them. And now he knew that those weeks had proved something to him that he wouldn't forget. He wasn't any less a man just because he was a runt. His height was simply characteristic of him, like red hair, or a quick brain, or—well, or a Tarzan-like body such as Fitz-Roy had.

He struggled to the ground as a remembrance came to him. Wilma!

"I've got somebody I want to see," he chattered in explanation as he elbowed through the crowd of cheering men. There was a roar of laughter.

"She's over there," somebody said.

Perry walked slowly toward her. She was on her knees, packing blankets around an unconscious man. She looked up.

Her lips parted.

"You were wonderful, Perry," she said huskily.

She came to her feet.

She towered over him.

Perry staggered back.

Wilma Warren was nearly six feet tall!

He digested that fact, while a stunned feeling grew inside of him. Nearly six feet tall, he was thinking. Five feet seven came closer to it, maybe. He felt that he should be horrified. He felt that he should feel his life was ruined. He should scream out loud that fate had dealt Perry Wren, the runt, another dirty deal. But somehow—

Wilma flinched, her glorious eyes troubled. A soft flush spread on her tender features.

"It—it doesn't make any difference, does it, Perry?" Her voice was frightened. "Not—not if we love each other?"

Somehow it didn't make any difference! He loved Wilma, and she loved him, and that was what mattered, and it was just as Fabricus had said. Perry had learned a lesson he wouldn't forget. A new Perry Wren had risen from the ashes of the old, a Perry Wren who had a new tolerance, a new understanding, a bigger mind! He was proud of that, suddenly. And he was proud that he knew Fabricus, because Fabricus' force-dome, with a few improvements added by Fabricus after he got well, was going to prove a powerful factor in the winning of the war. . . .

But right now, there was only one thing he wanted to do. He wanted to chase the fright out of Wilma's eyes. He wanted to comfort her, to take her in his arms, to tell her he loved her.

He did. He kissed her. And they didn't find any technical difficulties at all.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

THE ETERNAL NOW

An Amazing Complete Novelet of the Fourth Dimension

By **MURRAY LEINSTER**

AND MANY OTHER STORIES

"Dreaming" Down AXIS PLANES

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

THE SKY looked almost as black for America as for Western Europe in the early summer of 1940. The Nazi hordes were overrunning supposedly impregnable Allied defense positions as if they were built of cheese.

Whenever a new defense was improvised, Luftwaffe bombers and fighters would demolish it, usually before the men on the ground caught sight of a German uniform.

David B. Parkinson, then twenty-nine years old and employed by the Bell Telephone Laboratories as a physicist for only two years, was as worried as the rest of us about how to stop the deluge of war. He was so worried,

in fact, that not even sleep could banish his fears.

His dreams were of the battle overseas. One of them, in particular, stood out. It was a Black Terror of a dream, in which, using an electrical device conceived in the fourth dimension, he manned an anti-aircraft gun that shot down a German bomber with every shot.

Most of us dismiss such dreams as hogwash when we awaken. But not Parkinson. It occurred to his trained physicist's mind that there were factors in his fantastic sleep-born gadget that might be translated into reality. So Parkinson rolled up his sleeves and went to work.



U.S. Army Signal Corps Photos
Anti-aircraft range finder used to determine position of enemy planes.

*The Fantastic
Invention
Conceived by
David B. Parkinson
in His Sleep
Becomes a Deadly
Reality at
Tunisia, Italy
and
Guadalcanal*

Late last autumn, the actuality was unveiled to the press for the first time in a special show put on by an anti-aircraft battery on the grounds of the Bell Laboratories at Summit, New Jersey. Known to the Army, Navy and Marine Corps as the M9 electrical gun director, it not only uses electrical computations to predict the path of enemy bombers, but also aims the guns automatically and sets the fuses of the shells to explode at just the right altitude.

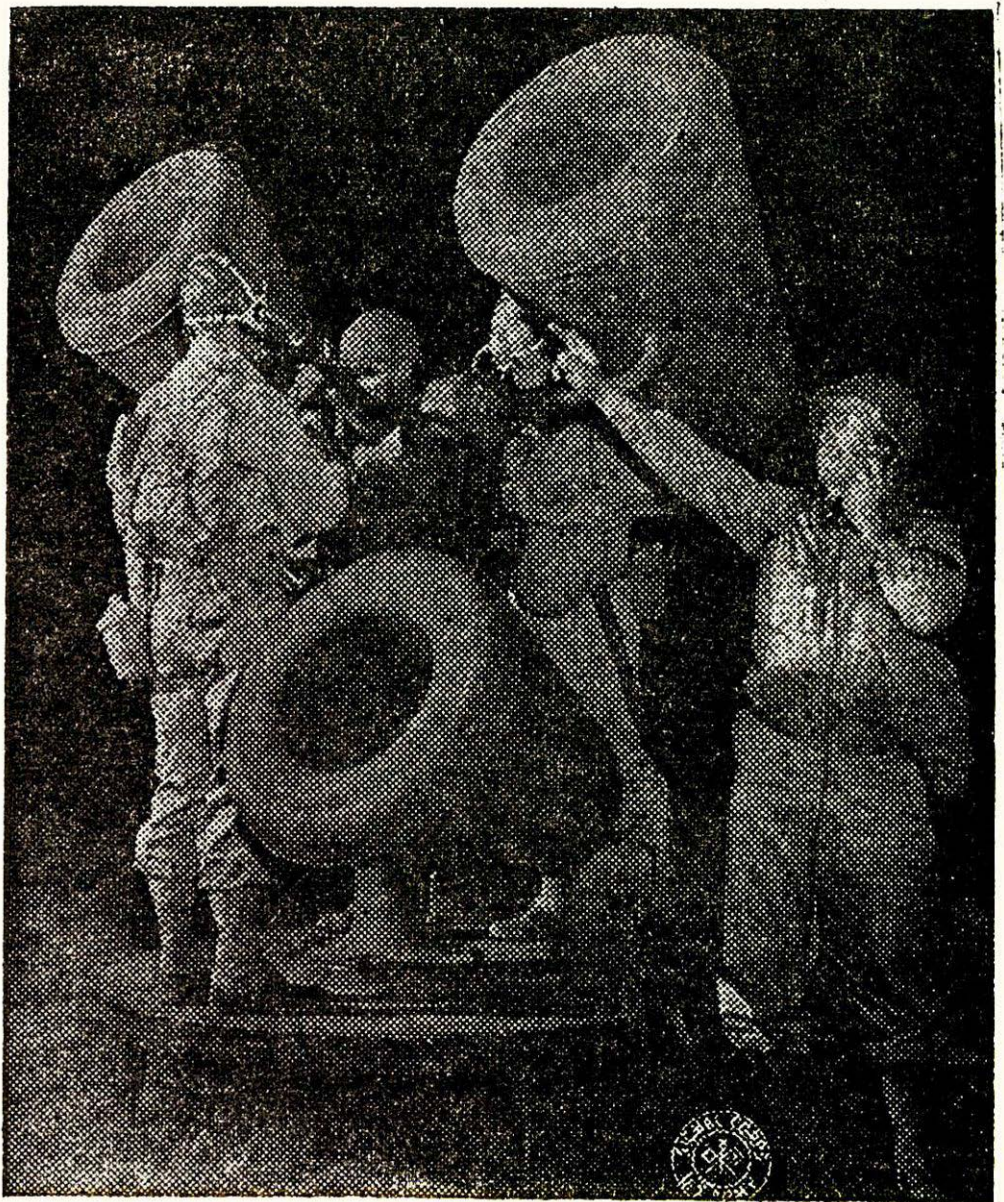
Superficially, the new fire control instrument looks much like the mechanical devices already in use for this purpose. Inside, however, it is a horse of another feather. Previous fire control gadgets used trains of cams and gears to translate movements of telescopic sights and dial adjustments into terms of predicted positions of the target at the time of shellburst.

Parkinson's invention eliminates the mechanical train and uses, instead, an electrical hookup, which is even more accurate and sensitive, since it includes variable factors no mechanical devices can pick up. In short, it stays on the target automatically once it has found it.

Electrical Hook-up Best

Elimination of the metallic cams, shafts and gears of the mechanical train does away with one source of error, since mechanical gadgets can always break down or go awry. Furthermore, temperature changes cause expansion and contraction of metal parts, but have virtually no effect on the new electrical mechanism.

Furthermore, it works smoothly, without



Sound locators track the plane, supplying data by means of which electric controls on guns are worked

the sudden, jerky changes hitherto necessary in making quick range alterations. By the time the instrument's final integration begins to swing the heavy guns, the changes have become even and steady, corresponding to the actual motion of the target in the air.

In the only statement so far released by the Army about the effectiveness of the new fire control apparatus, it is said that Parkinson's invention when employed to direct fire against a towed sleeve target, enabled the guns almost invariably to tear the sleeve to ribbons under all conditions.

Scuffed at AA Fire

Back in the days of the first World War, German anti-aircraft guns were referred to contemptuously as "archies" by Allied pilots, who literally thumbed their noses at the possibility of ground fire damaging their planes. On the Allied side, according to Major General Levin H. Campbell Jr., Chief of Ordnance, "We used to hit German planes—not knock them down, mind you—at the rate of one for every seventeen thousand rounds of ammunition."

No wonder the Bishops, Guynemers, Richt-hofens and Rickenbackers worried little about fire from the ground. If they were shot at ten times a trip, they could make 1,700 trips, or one a day for more than five years, before

the law of averages caught up with them and their planes were hit—and even then, it was a one-in-five chance they wouldn't be badly damaged.

And guns fired then at only a fraction of the rate they use today, when every Bofors weapon in action carries extra barrels to be screwed into place in a few seconds when the one in use is burned out by the rapid rate of fire. They had to set fuses by hand, without the aid of computers, had largely to guess the height of the target and the time it would take the shell to get up there.

Fire Shells in Clips

Today, all but the heaviest anti-aircraft cannon are automatic and fire shells in clips of from ten to a thousand. With Parkinson's fire control device in operation, they are aimed automatically at a target that may be hidden behind miles of clouds, and the fuses are set without human guesswork. In fact, there is darned little guesswork in it.

The invention is not always infallible. Sometimes a plane can get away. But its results are attested to by Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandergrift, who commanded the Marine landings on both Guadalcanal and Bougainville in the Solomons.

"Using ninety-millimeter cannons," says the general, "We knocked down enemy planes within range at the rate of one for every ninety rounds of ammunition used."

That's quite a comedown from one hit per 17,000 rounds. And when one of those 90-millimeter jobs explodes close to a plane, it

isn't just a hit—it's curtains. Along with this, when one considers the rapid rate of fire of modern anti-aircraft weapons, it doesn't give an enemy plane a very long life once it comes within range.

The 90-millimeter cannon is the current standard heavy anti-aircraft weapon for the Army. It can hurl its 26-pound projectile to a height of 11,000 yards, or over six miles in the air, which means that only the highest flying planes can stay out of its reach.

This was considered high enough until recent precision bombing successes achieved by our heavy bombers over Europe at even greater altitudes suggested that the enemy might take a leaf from our book and start bombing from up in the attic himself.

"A Honey of a Gun"

The result is a brand new anti-aircraft cannon now beginning to roll off the assembly lines which General Campbell calls "a honey of a gun." It is a 4.7 inch or 120-millimeter affair, and its ceiling is a little matter of twelve miles—far, far above the ceiling of the highest altitude planes now in the air or on the designers' tables of any nation.

Coupled with Parkinson's amazing predictor—range finder—gun pointer—fuse setter, it suggests that the lot of the bomber in the future will not be as happy as it is today when interceptors are not present to drive him from the target aloft.

Parkinson's dream was one dream which has been put to immediate use against the foes of liberty—to their sorrow.

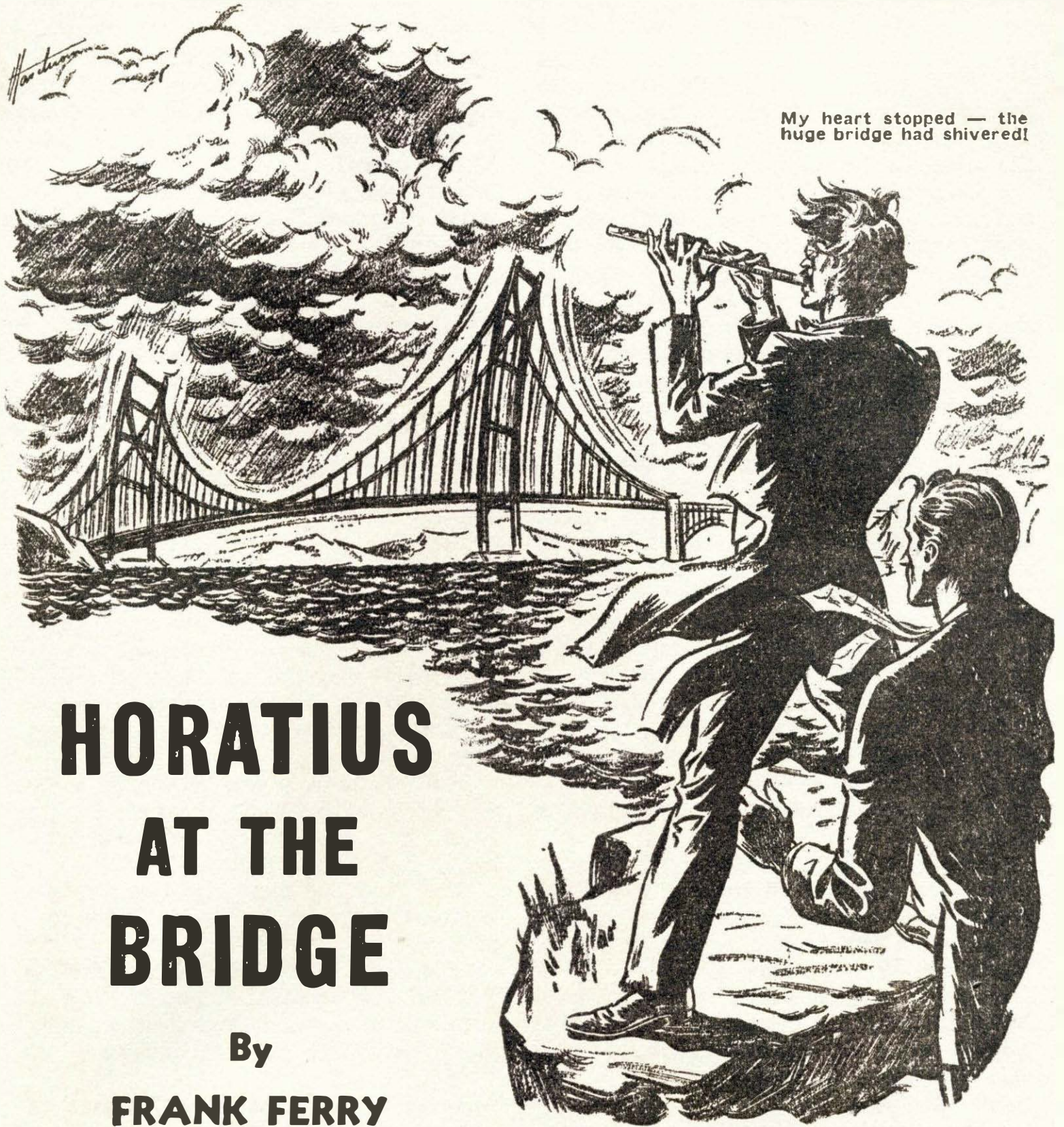
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They sure rate high with well-groomed men!**



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My heart stopped — the huge bridge had shivered!

HORATIUS AT THE BRIDGE

By
FRANK FERRY

The Pied Piper of Hamelin Had Nothing on Little Sophus Josephus, Musician Extraordinary with the Absolute Pitch!

I'M NO public benefactor. It's simply that I get cold feet now and then—like when somebody starts playing a flute, for example. For to me, a flute isn't just something that goes "wheesh" or "whoosh" or "feesh" at the wrong time. It's a wicked little thing that gives me—well, the creeps.

Let's go back a bit to the peculiar, odd, or just plain unfortunate day when the famous

Tacoma Narrows Bridge came crashing down. Of course you remember. It was in the papers and in the newsreels. The only structure of its kind, a novelty suspension bridge. For more than a year they studied the problems of wind-resistance, stress and strain, and all the rest. The wind is notorious at the Tacoma Narrows.

And the darn thing fell down. Why? They said it was the exceptionally high

A PRIZE-WINNING AMATEUR CONTEST STORY

wind, that some metal plates offered too much wind-resistance, that the bridge was too narrow. Oh, they had a lot of reasons.

But remember this: they had a model of the bridge in the engineering department of the University of Washington. And they tested it. And the eminent professor of aerodynamics said it was okay, so they went ahead and built the bridge.

Yet, it fell down. Like a giant whip, those tons of steel and concrete snapped and twisted and writhed—and then went plop into the bay. And it fell down under highly interesting, if not suspicious, circumstances.

But anyway, I was down at the Public Safety Building, several months after the bridge went. As a reporter on the Seattle Star, I was keeping tabs on things in town; and one of my tabs was Sergeant McBride.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. McBride was propped up behind the desk involved in a detective magazine, and every so often sneezing like fury. He had a cold—a large, determined cold, just like himself.

I was hanging around mostly because I had a tip that Wung Low's gambling joint was being raided, and there might be a story, or some story. I had the night to kill.

There were a lot of stories around Seattle, even then. We had all kinds of foreigners, we had merchant-marine sailors, we had lumberjacks, we had sin on a large scale, and we had graft. You couldn't miss.

So I was in a chair across the room from McBride, matching dimes with myself, and hoping something would break. And then this guy came in the door, and stopped before McBride.

He was a little, soggy guy with a mop of black hair, and he was anywhere from thirty to a hundred years old. He had on the remains of a dress suit, and he wore a crafty, I-ate-the-cream look on his puss. I wondered where he got the flute.

Then the guy piped up.

"Ah! The policemen, no?"

McBride, I saw, was right in the middle of a good case, and justly resented any interference. He put down the magazine and scowled.

"What you want?" And he wasn't pleased with what he saw.

"The policemen." The little guy had that look-what-I-did smugness on his face, mixed with scorn.

I had moved forward, occupying the space at McBride's left. I looked up at him and raised my eyebrows.

"You got the police," McBride pointed out.

"Ah, good! Then I will tell you all about it, I will tell you how I pull down the so famous Tacoma Narrows Bridge."

"Aw, fudge!" exploded McBride. "You blew it down with your little w'istle. G'wan, scram. I'm busy." And he went back to his magazine.

So I put my oar in.

"So you pulled down the bridge, huh? How'd you do it?" I thought it might be good for one of those human interest things we have to do now and then.

THE little guy was affable and pleased about an audience.

"As the policemen say, with my flute—not whistle," he corrected.

"Yeah?"

"Certainly, I do not lie. Behold!" he said, getting warmed up. "You know it is possible to break metal with sound from a violin, that they say one can stand on a large bridge, and play the right note, and then—crash! Down she come!"

"You're telling me," I said, keeping a straight face.

"And of a surety you know that soldiers crossing a bridge must change pace, must break step, or they find the soul of the bridge and break it down . . ."

"Soul?" I had him pegged as a religious fanatic then, since the Pacific Coast crawls with 'em.

"Yes, soul. The—the note, the pitch that you find, that you kill . . . You find this note, you make it respond—and then she breaks, no?" He was getting a bit involved.

"Your deal."

He was getting mad, and his eyes were sort of hot and nasty.

"You laugh," he growled deep in his throat. "I will show you." And he reached up onto McBride's desk and grabbed a water glass, placing it carefully on a corner, where it balanced rather precariously.

"Hey!" yelled McBride. "What's goin' on? I thought I told you to scram!"

"Wait, Mac," I said, giving him the wink, "the professor here's going to give us a demonstration of how to break a glass with a flute."

"Huh?"

"Yeah. He's going to play his whistle, and break the glass with sound."

"Yeah? Says who?"

"For Pete's sake," I begged, "let's see the show." And I tipped the wink again, which he finally got.

"Okay, professor, go on," he said, "but you

gotta buy me a new glass!" And he let out a loud burst of noise that was supposed to be laughter.

The little guy raised up and sneered at us.

"I am Professor Sophus Josephus, and I will show you."

He then unslung his flute, and started playing. He could play all right, but nothing I ever heard before or since. It was heavy and sweet like honey, it was bitter and sour like lemon, it was like—well, like nothing you can accurately describe.

Something told me to watch the glass, because this something said that the glass would break. So I watched it. And sud-

whacked McBride over the head with his flute. He must have been high-strung.

There was nothing to do, of course. So McBride locked him up. I don't blame McBride, because he didn't know, and he did have reason for being sore. Besides the Professor bothering him, I mean. The raid on the Chinese joint burned out, and McBride was accused of tipping Wung Low off. But he didn't: I did.

I had more or less forgotten the Professor and his flute until, a week or so later, I picked up a very weird tale. I heard that a guy had slipped out of the city jail, and the police were keeping it under their hats, because they didn't know how the guy had

Meet the Author of This Story!



Frank Ferry

WISH I could say I am green all over, and covered with pink, pale hair because that would really be fun to hear; and would certainly set me off from the rest of the people who try to make a living by writing. Confidentially, the difference between a writer and a non-writer is that writers actually send stories off in the mails. I was once told by a Hollywood executive that a writer is somebody who knows the right people. I should be pleased to meet them.

What really ruined me for work, though, was having a little better than four years of college, because all I did was absorb a lot of wonderfully convincing arguments as to why I should have people support me in idleness rather than support myself in that ideal state. I also acquired a taste for archaeology and social psychology.

I think I was born with a book in my mouth, since every time I was permitted a choice between reading or perspiring with toil the book always won, hands down. I have the acquisitive instinct polished to an exceedingly high degree.

The reason I write—if you are kind enough to permit that description—is because I once told a shoal of people I was a writer. I told that to a very lovely girl a little while ago, and she believed me. Now married to her, what else can I do?—*Frank Ferry.*

denly I would swear, the glass shivered and seemed to waver out of sight.

And just then, of course, McBride sneezed—an earth-shaking, world-blasting sneeze. And he either blew the glass off the table or knocked it off, or shattered it with the sneeze.

Anyway, the glass smashed on the floor.

"Oh!" I said.

"Ahrh!" said the Professor, "you—you bloated pig!"

"What?" said McBride. And he came from behind the desk like Doom, and grabbed the Professor and shook him like a rat. "You little runt, blast your hide! You come in and mess around, and—" He ran out of words.

"It isn't as bad as that," I started to say.

But the Professor, who had finally been released, fixed it himself. Without a hint, he

got out. And further, that if the police told what they thought were the facts, then somebody's neck would have been cut.

So I 'phoned McBride.

"How's fishing, Mac?" I said. "This is Larry."

"Umph."

"Well, I never! Say, Mac, remember that peanut man there's a reward for? Yeah? Well, I'll trade you dope for dope." I just made this up, because the case was hot and would get McBride to talk—maybe.

"What peanut man?"

It was going to be tough.

"The ten-thousand buck peanut man."

"Yeah? Just a minute, I'll take the call on another 'phone."

So I waited. I decided to tell Mac the peanut man was down at a flop-house on Jackson. It was plausible, and would take some

time to confirm. Besides, how was I to know but maybe the guy was there? Heck, they pick guys up there all the time. You'd be surprised.

"LARRY?" Mac's voice was low and cautious.

"Yeah. Well, who spills first? I want the dope on the guy who sneaked out of the can under circumstances I hear—"

"What you talking about?"

"The bird who flew the coop. Come on, Mac, they won't know."

"Well—where's the peanut man?"

He was practically hooked, so I decided to trust him.

"Down at this flop-house," and I gave the name. "He's dyed his hair black, and is wearing a beard. They call him Wilkins." I had my fingers crossed. It was possible.

"Straight—?"

"As your hair." Mac was almost bald.

There was a pause.

"Okay, but I'll have your hide if you're playing games. So I'll give you the dope: the guy who got out was your Professor with the w'istle."

"What?"

"Yeah, and dust out your ears—some of the bars were gone!"

"Gone! What d'ya mean. Did he eat them?"

"Listen, you," and I could tell he was a bit peeved. "I'm giving it straight. Some of the steel bars were gone."

". . . like smoke?"

"Like smoke. And is the old man sore!" I knew Mac had felt the wrath.

"How about a look? That's some story."

"Oh yeah? You come down here snooping, and I'll pin your ears to your neck. And keep your mouth closed where you heard this." He paused again. "So he calls himself Wilkins, huh, and wears a beard? Thanks, pal, I won't forget you." And he rang off.

But I had things to think about. If Mac had it right—if the Professor had fixed the bridge—if . . . Well, if a lot of things, then here was a story. Holy cats! What a story!

I went out to the University and had a talk with the aerodynamics fellow. All I got was a lot of highly scientific eye-wash; the authority still was sensitive about the bridge's failure. I hinted about steel bars and sound waves. But it was no soap—he just smiled.

So I tried to sneak into the city jail, and have a look. But I got tossed out on my ear.

Then I went to the old man. It was a

mistake. He looked at me.

"My boy," he said, "this is a newspaper. If you were a reporter you would keep your big, blue eyes open! McBride caught the peanut man—"

"With a beard, by the name of Wilkins?"

"Yeah. You must be psychic. With a beard."

But the Professor wouldn't let me forget about it; I don't know how he found out my name, but a couple of months after he left Seattle, I got a letter.

"Mr. Larry Jenkins," it said, "they will not believe that I destroyed the wonderful Tacoma Narrows Bridge, and that I escaped from the so famous Seattle jail." It went on like that some more. And then it said, "I have work so hard improving my technique, and now I break from many jails. But you believe me, and I will show you and the world. For soon, friend Larry, I shall make the so magnificent San Francisco bridge to come down, the Golden Gate Bridge . . ."

This was rather strong. The Golden Gate Bridge is somewhat larger than the Tacoma bridge, and would make a bigger splash. But why suspension bridges—or did he mean to stop even there? Then I decided I was getting slightly mushy, and I gave the whole thing a miss.

That is, until I ran across a story.

Spokane, Washington, A.P.

It is reported without confirmation that a certain Professor Sophus Josephus escaped from the city jail today, under unrevealed circumstances. An unidentified authority stated that an investigation was being conducted. Sheriff Jones promised recapture of the fugitive within twenty-four hours.

And then, like tales began dropping in from all over the state. Yakima, Sunnyside, Olympia. The reports began to use the words "mysterious, peculiar, strange . . ." They were unconnected, backpage items, and I wouldn't have paid too much attention, except that the Professor sent me a handful of clippings.

I almost went to the old man—but remembered some local stories I'd missed. Instead, I started watching the teletype. And I learned things. Now, the reports began dropping in from cities in Oregon—Portland, Eugene, Rosedale. The Professor seemed to be heading south. After a while, the reports started having California datelines. But nobody seemed to pay much attention, or connect things up.

Over a period of a little more than eight months, the Professor "got" out of around

fifty assorted jails. The time lapse might be why nobody got wise.

I began to get a little excited. So I took a list of these reports to the old man, and asked him what he thought.

He told me. So I kissed him good-by. And the same day, I got another letter from the Professor. It was really hot, this time. He was in the San Francisco jug, and did I want to come down and watch the Golden Gate Bridge fold up.

I told myself that I really couldn't stop him, and it would be a whale of a story—if anybody would believe me. But I didn't consider that. I took the next plane to 'Frisco.

OF COURSE, the San Francisco coppers wanted to know who I was and why I wanted to see a nobody like the Professor; and besides, he got violent now and then, and might throw things.

I took that as my clue. I claimed to be a psychology student from the University of Washington, and knew something about such cases. And on top of that, the Professor's old mother had asked me to see how he was. I don't know why, but that got the desk sergeant.

They took me to where the Professor was, and before he could let any stray cats loose, I started talking wildly about the weather, and wasn't San Francisco a wonderful town, and so on. Finally the guard got tired and started dozing in a chair some distance away.

So then I asked the Prof how long he was in for, and when the big show was coming.

He grinned. "They say I am bad, and must stay here a whole long time." And he winked. "The big show, my friend, will be when you say."

I must have looked unconvinced. He fixed me with his eye.

"What o'clock is it now? Ten hours, good. Now, you will take yourself back to your hotel, and I will to meet you there at—let us say high noon."

So I told him where I was staying, and agreed to be waiting. Then I beat it for my hotel and watched the telephone like a cat.

At one minute past twelve o'clock, high noon, the telephone rang. It was the desk-clerk. And there was a—ah—a person to see me.

Well, having the Professor show up like that was pretty strong evidence. As we met in the lobby, I congratulated him, and he was swelled up like a toad.

And if this got me excited, it was capped as we rode along in a taxi, headed for the Golden Gate Bridge. Just by accident, the

cabby drove us past the city jail where the Professor had been. It looked like a convention, with coppers and plainclothes dicks running in and out like mad, all looking worried and red-faced.

I caught a glimpse of a guy looking out of an upper window. All the windows around it had heavy bars, but this one didn't seem to have.

The Professor had seen it too, and he smiled and nodded. I was sold.

And I saw headlines splashed over the papers: "Exclusive by Larry Jenkins:—Today I saw the mighty Golden Gate Bridge go crashing down into the sea below. It was a beautiful day . . ."

But here we were at the bridge. I paid the cabby off, and the Professor and I started off along the abutment to one side of the bridge.

It was a magnificent view. At our left was the ocean reaching out of sight, and at our right was the expanse of the Bay, with Oakland, and Richmond sparkling in the sunshine. There was the Island, and Nob Hill, and Fisherman's Wharf. Whether it was the view or the fresh breeze I don't know: but I was shivering. And my feet were getting cold.

I looked down at the water. About a million miles down was the water. It looked awfully wet and deep. It looked unpleasant, and it looked expectant, like it was waiting for the bridge and everything on it.

I wanted that story. It was the chance of a life-time. In fact, I was so hipped-up I might have been drunk. I felt, rather than knew that the wind had gone up a bit, and there was a lot of traffic on the bridge. It could have been one or the other.

But the Professor placed the flute to his lips and got out a series of weird squeaks. And then my heart stopped and the hair rose on my head—the huge bridge had shivered slightly!

Already seeing geysers of salt water as the bridge came crashing down, all thoughts of exclusive stories fled. I had cold feet. It was enough for me.

With a sick grin on my face, and not exactly knowing what I did, I took the flute out of the Professor's hands. I tried to make it sound convincing.

"Let me do it, Prof."

At the same time I raised it to my lips, and pretended to prepare to play.

But I had got him between the eyes.

"No!" he screamed, suddenly, and without warning. "You will cheat me of my glory! Give me the flute!" And he grabbed

for it. Well, it only took a second, and then I gave it back, not saying a word.

With a snort, and with anger still in his eyes, he put it back to his mouth and started playing again.

This time, though, the quality was changed, but he didn't seem to notice.

I died quietly for a breath or two, then gradually came back to life. I'd lost a story—but I'd saved innocent people. I thumbed my nose at the defeated ocean.

Then I watched the Professor, but not with a sense of impending doom.

He was having trouble. He would tootle like mad, and then glare at the flute. He would look apologetically at me, and then tootle again. I felt sorry for him—but, story or no story, I wasn't going to be a witness to any such destruction.

And then the Professor went crazy, suddenly and wildly, as insane, high-strung people do. One minute he tweeted the flute, and the next minute he was jumping up and down screaming his head off. There was something about the flute being "deviled."

The thing hadn't come off as it should.

IT WAS rather difficult getting the raving Professor to a hospital, and explaining my presence to the doctor. But I made up a plausible tale that Mr. Jones had I were seeing the sights, and Mr. Jones had got another one of his "spells." Did I know him? Well, not very well. We were both from New York, and had met as strangers do.

And then I got out of there and began to kick myself for funking out. I told myself I'd merely been kidding myself, and the Prof was a fake. But it didn't sound convincing.

And there was another angle: I didn't have

any story I could sell. I wondered if I'd done the right thing in queering the flute; it took just a minute to twist the set-screw, and throw it off of the track. I figured if he could kill the "soul" in steel bars or cables or metal, that he did it with patterns of notes that he'd learned, and with these patterns getting certain sympathetic responses.

I'm no physicist, but that's what I figured. And that's how I worked it. By changing the set-screw, he got another, different set of notes and overtones and harmonics—the wrong set. I don't know why he didn't notice it, but then he might have been too excited. Lord knows I was. And he didn't locate the key-note of the bridge, and couldn't build up the right pattern.

At least, it was my opinion that I'd worked it that way. And the more I thought of it, as I hung around San Francisco, the more I wondered.

I decided to see the Professor, and find out.

Well, I might have known. When I had talked my way past the nurses and doctors—this time I was the Professor's nephew—and got to the old boy, it was all off. He had no use for flutes, didn't know what they were. He was thoroughly boiled.

The Professor fixed me with his fevered eye.

"Ah! You talk about this thing—this flute is it not? Pah! What is a flute! You say it goes 'squeak squeak squeak,' like a little bird. A little bird! I laugh, I scorn it. Now, I show you something." He came back with a huge brassy thing. "Behold, my friend, here is a something, here is . . ."

So I left. He was off on another tack. This time, it was a tuba.

*Next Issue: BLOATED BRAIN, by ALFRED G. KUEHN,
Another Prize-Winning Amateur Contest Story!*

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)



PLEASE PAGE SAMSON

ALL of the prehistoric fossils do not come from the Gobi Desert or the tar lakes of Los Angeles and elsewhere. In January of this year a modern monster—a stone crusher—bit deeply into a section of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, and came up with a twenty-inch section of jawbone containing fifty-three teeth.

Scientists at once went to work on this specimen at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences and have reconstructed a twenty-foot crocodile-like reptile that inhabited Pennsylvania swamps some two hundred million years ago, in the Triassic period.

The fossil was identified by Dr. Edwin H. Colbert as being the jawbone of a *Clepsysaurus*, a genus of reptiles similar but not ancestral to the modern cocodile. They were leading citizens of the animal world just before the later family of dinosaurs, dying out as the dinosaurs, increased in power and intelligence. But what a weapon for Samson this jawbone would have made!

GERM ROGUES GALLERY

HARD on the heels of the electron microscope comes the New Chemical Analyzer, developed by Dr. James Hillier of the Radio Corporation of America.

Where the electron microscope magnifies invisible viruses to 100,000 times their actual size, the chemical analyzer now automatically figures out just what they are composed of by shooting electrical particles at the part of the germ under observation.

Already some 26 of the 92 elements have been thoroughly identified and now with the attack started on germs, bacteria and infiltrable viruses to determine their chemical constituency so that science can intelligently combat the inimical sort, we may well be entering the final phase of the war between man and virulent disease.

For example, science has known for years that the tuberculosis germ is armored with some sort of waxy coating that has never been successfully penetrated because we have not known exactly what it is. The chemical analyzer will doubtless reveal just what this protective coating is—and science

will promptly develop the proper weapon of offense.

Thus, the ramparts of disease may well be defending their innermost citadel. In fact, we may even find out soon just what hash is made of.

GOOD-BY, MISSISSIPPI MUD

THE Hercules Powder Company comes forward with an amazing development. This is a chemical which may end muddy streets and muddy roads—not to speak of muddy and leaky cellars. This is a chemical which is designed to prevent mud by making soil waterproof.

It is a resin compound called Stabinol, costing well under ten cents per pound to produce and requiring only five pounds per average square yard in application. The idea is to make the top soil impervious to moisture, preventing water from seeping through the treated soil and turning it into mud. It also resists the rise of moisture from below by capillary action. A soil treatment is estimated to last for years.

What a boon for areaways, airplane fields, and other construction projects throughout the world!

Thus, what water does not drain off a treated area will remain in puddles until it evaporates. A car splashing through such a puddle will kick up dry dust and water—not mud. Oh, Mother, where are my rubber boots and the whiskbroom? I'm going wading with Skinnay!

SURGICAL BANKS NOW

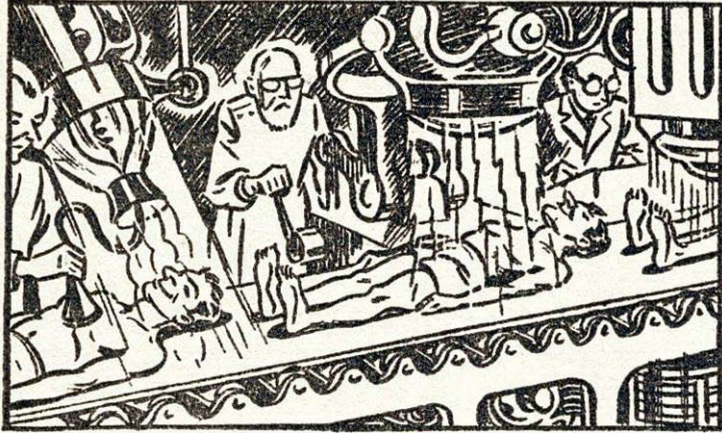
FOLLOWING close on the development of blood plasma comes now surgical banks of nerve tissue and living cartilage to be held in store indefinitely for plastic surgery. This dispenses with the old, somewhat hazardous, painful and not always successful method of taking cartilage grafts from the patient's own ribs.

Cartilage, for instance, is taken from the cadavers of young and healthy persons accidentally killed. It is cleaned and stored in a solution of merthiolate and salt and kept under refrigeration.

Lt. Col. Leslie L. Nunn, of the U. S. Army

A DEPARTMENT OF INTERESTING ODDITIES

Medical Department, has already established two such banks for military use at present. What with the new skin-slicing machine for grafting, the electrically driven circle-saw mounted on a pistol grip for the rapid re-



moval of heavy plaster casts, the new stapling machine invented by Wilson and Spencer of Detroit for the rapid and uniform insertion of surgical stitches, etc., we will soon have surgery on the production line.

Perhaps after the war we can totter in one door of a mechanized hospital, get on the assembly line and say to the doctor in charge, "Please renovate my body according to plan 57BX9," and come off the production line at the other end as a brand-new model for \$10.98.

NEW HEARTS FOR OLD

WHY not? As far back as some twenty years ago your science editor remembers a science fiction story which dealt with just such an operation. Today this formerly impossible feat of replacing an animal's heart has been accomplished by Professor N. P. Sinitsin of the Gorky Medical Institute of Moscow.

True, the animals thus far experimented on have been frogs, but the experiments have been successful, many of the subjects living for months, with electrocardiograms showing no difference in the muscle action of the transplanted hearts from that of frog hearts not transplanted.

The technique and the various experiments entail too much explanation to be included here, but this transplantation of vital organs is on the way, following logically the delicate operation of transplanting living corneas from human eye to human eye.

Now if we can just hold out until Dr. Sinitsin is ready for us maybe we won't have to get those old shoes re-soled.

HOME FRONT REPORT

WE READ almost daily in the newspapers about a scrap drive for this or that, an appeal for Victory Gardens, and various pleas to save one thing or another. But we never see concrete figures on the results of these drives. So let's take a moment off from scientific data and consider a few amazing salvage figures.

In 1943 fully one-eleventh of all foodstuffs produced in the United States came from Victory Gardens. That is more than nine percent of a lot of edible stuff—a record to be proud of. Let's beat it this year.

A 50 x 100 foot Victory Garden is large enough for a moderate-sized family. And did you know that twelve hours of farm labor will grow enough wheat for one person for a year, while it takes 419 hours to raise enough chickens for the same purpose? Also, that there are more than 70 non-food industrial uses for sugar? Sugar is used even in welding.

The scrap metal drive doesn't stop with civilians. The Armed Forces industriously salvage metal scraps from battlefields. They also systematically remove serviceable parts from scrapped machines and assemble them in a single working mechanism. And nearly 7,000,000 pounds of tin scrap are collected by the Army each month.

One railroad system salvaged more than 1,000,000 pounds of discarded paper on its trains in one year. Scrap rubber turned in by the public since 1942, totaling some 750,000 tons, is being used at a rate of about 35,000 tons per month to make vital military products and for recapping civilian auto tires.

Despite a record slaughter of meat animals in 1943, the number of livestock on farms increased during the year. Thus, meat production this year is expected to reach the record high of 25,000,000,000 pounds, dressed weight basis. And giving housewives two meat-fats ration points for each pound of waste kitchen fats turned in has doubled the weekly amount of fats available for war purposes.

There, are you proud of yourselves? Well, let's beat the records in 1944. Because from twenty to thirty percent of all food produced in this country is wasted somewhere between the plow and the plate!

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH?

SINCE time immemorial man has sought wistfully for some way to lengthen his span of life. Don't ask me why. The whole



thing is relative, and the result is just the same in the end, whether the span is ten years or ten hundred. But alchemists sought

the elixir of eternal life and Ponce de Leon sought the fountain of youth.

Comes now Dr. L. Emmett Holt, Jr., of Johns Hopkins University, with the information that the elixir of youth exists in everyday protein foods, such as meat, cheese, eggs, etc.

The substance that wards off senility is called tryptophane, one of the dozens of essential building blocks of life known as the amino acids. And Professor William J. Van Wagendonk of Oregon State College announces that certain muscular stiffness and the deposits of calcium phosphate in all organs and parts of the body are caused by dietary deficiency in cream. This little building block is one of the ketones, and it is a preventive factory.

So it would seem that all we have to do is maintain the proper diet—and drink fluorinated water for the preservation of teeth—and we will remain on the highway of health. Hand me the ration books, Papa; I'm going shopping.

STRONG AND HEALTHY

WHILE we are in a vegetating frame of mind, let us consider that bane of the social register—the lowly onion. Perhaps Grandma wasn't so far wrong, after all, when she made Dad wear a little bag of garlic or asafetida about his neck to ward off disease. Anyway, promising results have been observed from the use of onion paste as a surgical dressing for infected wounds.

Reported by Dr. Toroptsev and Dr. Filatova of the Tomsk State University, USSR, the essential oils of onion, garlic and certain other strong-scented vegetables contain bacteria-killing substances called phytoncides. The vapors from ground-up onions, etc., when brought to a wound relieved pain at once and promoted rapid healing. Coupled with the curative powers of the sulpha drugs, it looks as though we can wear our vegetables as well as eat them.

And another thing, Rosalie! Don't turn up your nose at the gent who sits besides you in the train or on the bus because he reeks of garlic or onion. He is likely the most antiseptic person in the car.

CAR TROUBLE

IN SPITE of the curtailment of production by war, there are still more than 36,000,000 cars, buses and trucks—not including military vehicles—running throughout the world. This is only 8,000,000 less than at the close of 1939.

And what do they run on?

In the first place, roads. It takes a ton of dynamite to produce the material for surfacing one mile of roadway. To mine the metal used to make one small 1942-model automobile requires a pound. And this does not consider the millions of pounds of ex-

plosive used each year in prospecting for new petroleum sources, or increasing the flow of old wells.

A process for extracting oil from shale was patented in Scotland in 1853. Shale oil offers great promise in supplementing petroleum, yielding products almost identical. Oil-bearing shale is widely distributed about the earth.

From consideration of which we go to rubber. Synthetic rubber production is now greater than the rate of crude rubber consumption in America prior to 1941. However, the supply is not yet sufficient to meet the present demands. So ride easy for a while yet.

Fuel? Zero octane gasoline may operate automobiles in the future. A radical power plant is already under development which makes use of radiant energy from low-grade fuels, according to Dr. Carlton H. Schlesman, head of the research laboratories of the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company.

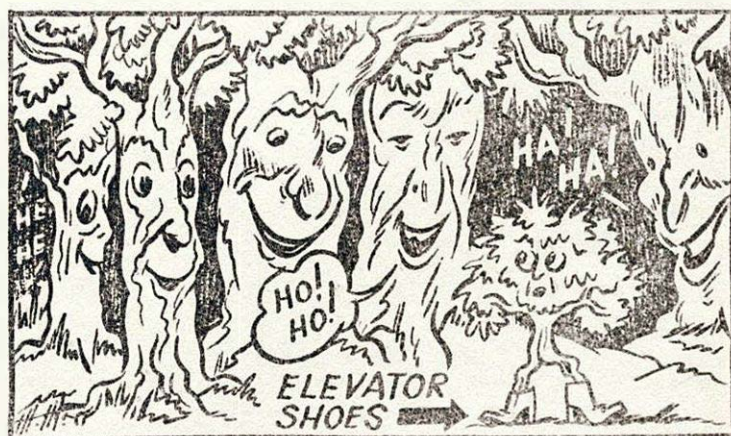
On the other hand, there is solid fuel (discussed last issue) and also the possibility of alcohol. By modern processes fifty gallons of alcohol is obtained from one ton of wood waste.

All we need next is to take that successful rocket plane the Allies have been experimenting with and run it on the ground. We mean that jet propulsion plane developed by British Group Captain Frank Whittle which passes a Spitfire like a "racehorse passing a hack." Why worry about gasoline and atomic power?

Mac, hand me my plastic suit and light the fuse in my tail ensemble. I'm going motor-ing in my helicopter in 1950.

ARBOREAL GIANT AND DWARF

THIS month's nature lesson deals with trees, perhaps man's greatest inanimate friend. There are 862 species of trees grow-



ing in the United States, 228 varieties, and 87 hybrids—making a total of 1,177 different kinds of trees. Of this astonishing number only 104 varieties are of commercial importance.

Which brings to mind the amusing matter of the Asiatic Paulownia, or Empress tree,

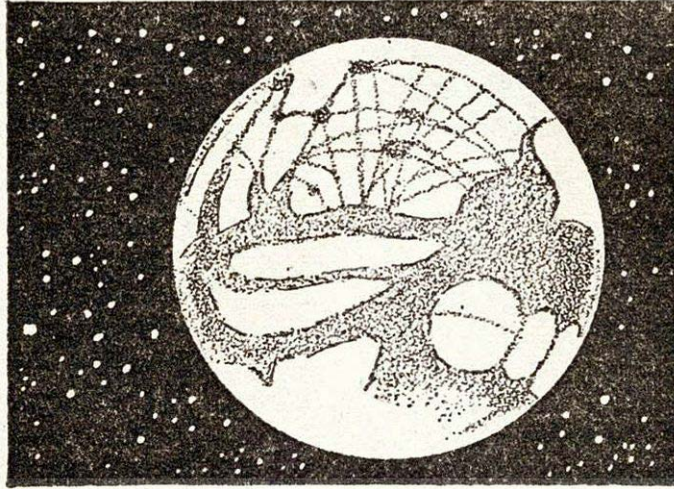
which was imported from Japan and is found extensively in the Atlantic States. This tree was regarded as a "sacred" tree by the Japs—until 1912, at which time it was learned that the tree is really of Chinese origin, not Japanese.

The largest single tree in the world seems to be a chestnut tree near the foot of Mt. Etna in Sicily which had a trunk circumference of 200 feet. However, the largest species of tree known is the giant redwood of California, called the Sequoia. The tallest

known tree in the world is a sequoia in Humboldt State Park which towers 364 feet above the ground.

The smallest tree known is the Dwarf Willow which grows on many mountains above the timberline. This tree measures only two or three inches in height at full maturity and is complete even to miniature catkins similar to those of other willow trees.

Nature, like man, can go from one extreme to the other. And we will dig you up another giant and jeep example next issue.



A miner on Mars rises to spectacular heights of power on the Red Planet while the Universe hums with amazing intrigue that will astonish you in SHADOW OVER MARS, a complete book-length novel of the future by LEIGH BRACKETT, coming in the Fall issue of

STARTLING STORIES

OUT SOON—15c AT ALL STANDS!

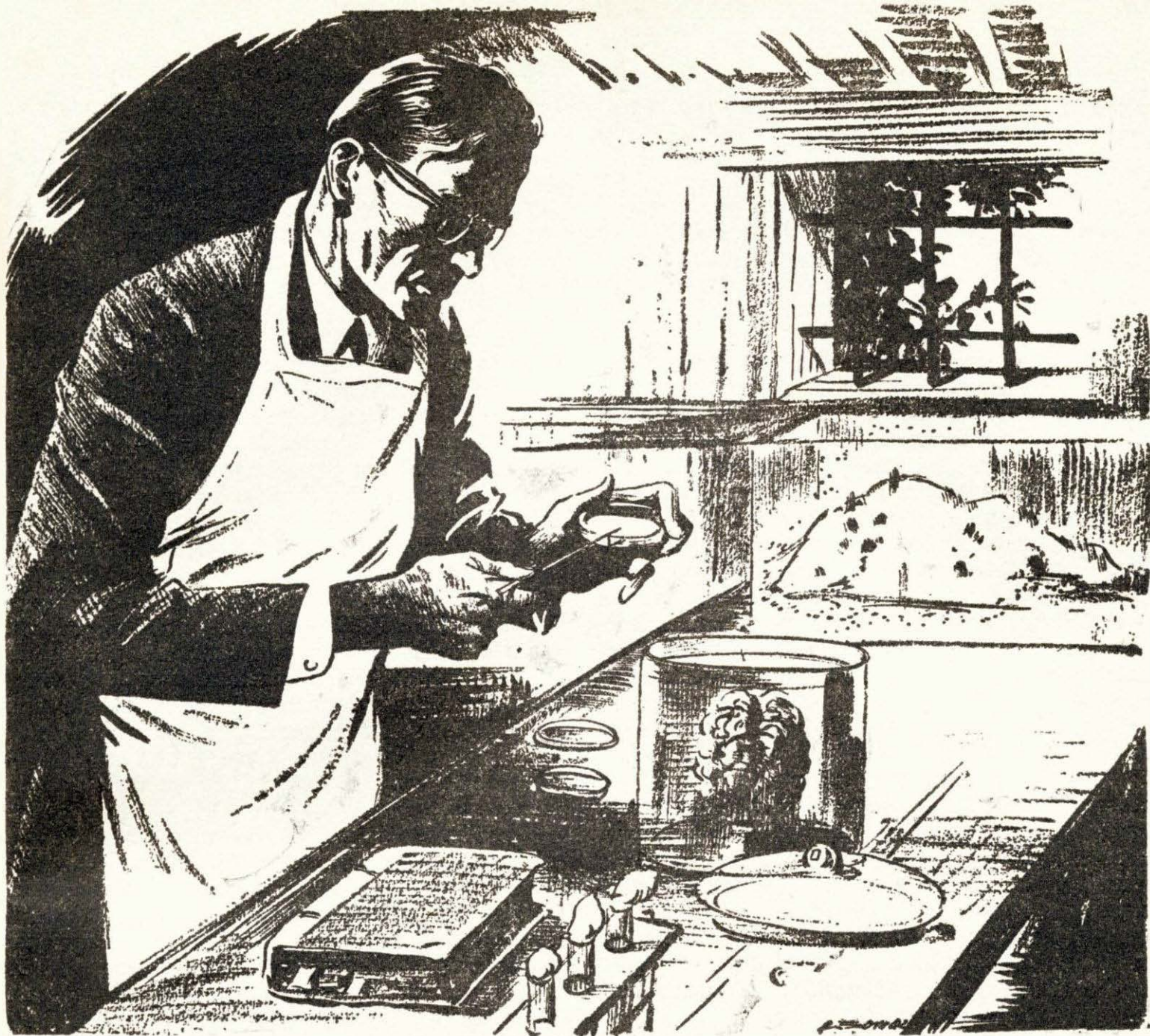
**TRUE LOVE
IS SMOOTH!**

**YES -
THANKS TO
STAR BLADES!**

6NX PROCESS
STAR
DOUBLE EDGE

4 for 10¢

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SINGLE EDGE



With a tiny pipette, Kronk transferred the minute speck into the cranial cavity of the ant

TERROR IN THE DUST

By PAUL S. POWERS

Malignant Forces Are Released When Dr. Kronk, Neurologist, Uses the Brain of a Murdered Associate to Create Ants with Human Intelligence!

DR. KRONK'S experiment had been brilliantly successful and developments even more interesting, the doctor hoped, were yet to come.

The young professor, John Clarkson, had been dead and buried for more than a month, but small portions of his brain were still alive and healthy in the carefully controlled nutritive solution. Kronk had good reason to believe that other portions, infinitesimal in size, were living and functioning in the heads of some thousands of red ants.

Many colonies of the ants were swarming in a row of glass-fronted boxes along one wall of the laboratory. The queen of each, as well as many of the worker and fighter individuals had been treated with the transplanted brain substance—"the essence of mind," as Kronk liked to call it.

For the material did not consist of gross gray matter, but of the nuclei of the cells themselves. Dissecting away the axons and dendrites of the neuron without causing the death of the inner protoplasm was only one

of many difficulties connected with the work. But Dr. Kronk had solved all the technical problems with that amazing skill which had made his scientific fame world-wide.

"When I've prepared my notes for publication," the doctor chuckled harmlessly, "there'll be some opinions changed! Those who've called me a charlatan, a monger of fakeries, will have to think of some new way to attack me. These discoveries will upset the whole world of Science."

Crouching on one knee, he peered through the glass wall of one of the nests. A casual glance would have detected nothing unusual in the busy swarm. But—at least so it seemed to the doctor—a more careful examination revealed a subtle change that had taken place in the insects' behavior.

Thought seemed to have replaced the automatic mechanism of normal ants, although it was difficult to decide just where the difference lay. There was much less aimless scurrying, not so much blundering, and communication between ants had speeded up.

For several days Kronk hadn't been sure that his implantation of human brain had "taken." For ants sometimes went about their business for long periods with no heads at all—thanks to the strange nervous system of the insect—only to die later. Only a few individuals out of hundreds had succumbed to Kronk's operation.

"One might almost think they were trying to communicate with me," the neurologist said aloud, watching several ants which had pressed close against the glass.

They were staring at him, he thought. Their feelers were jerking sharply, instead of waving vaguely about as did those of typical ants.

Kronk wondered if they had developed some sort of nervous tic, and for a long time he remained by the nest, an intent, triumphant look on his sardonic face.

"They might be trying to tell me something, the way they're acting," he mused.

FOR quite a while now he had been in the habit of talking to himself, or to his ant "patients." Since the death of Professor Clarkson he had been alone on this small tropical island. Not that he minded the loss of human companionship; he was glad to be by himself with his investigations.

Still, he was looking forward to the arrival of the plane from the South American mainland with pleasurable anticipation. Jane Hawley would be aboard, and now that the young and handsome professor was dead and out of the way—

"I admire her," Kronk reflected. "There aren't many women zoologists, and not many of them run the risks of collecting wild animals from all over the world. I like her

scientific point of view."

That was the one thing that Professor Clarkson, strangely enough, had lacked—the scientific outlook which ignores the merely personal equation. John Clarkson was a distinguished myrmecologist—an expert in the branch of entomology treating with ant life—but he had valued his own life above research, and at the last he had pleaded and begged Kronk not to kill him.

But Kronk had shot him near the heart, then trephined through the skull with the rotary saw while Clarkson was still living.

Everything had been prepared and waiting. The neurologist had employed the instrument known as Fenger's needle, which had a slot on one side with razor-sharp edges. This, when rotated, cut slender cylinders of tissue from the brain cortex at the spots that Kronk had selected.

Clarkson hadn't suffered much—the brain itself is insensible to pain—and of course Kronk could not have risked an anesthetic in any case. He wanted the cells normal and not drugged with chloroform or ether.

He should have been glad to die, Kronk thought smilingly, to have given his life—his mind!—to the insects that he had understood so well.

Dr. Kronk lighted a cigarette, and left the white-painted, galvanized iron shack that he and the late professor had erected as their combined laboratory. On the way out he paused to glance at the thermostat on the apparatus which kept the remaining shreds of gray matter alive and nourished. There being no electricity, a cleverly designed oil lamp, chemically controlled, kept the temperature at a constant 99° F.

Near the shack the white-clad doctor halted by the neat grave he had made for John Clarkson. A headboard had been fashioned to bear the name and the date of death. There was a brief inscription, too, and Kronk repeated it softly: "'Martyr to Science.'" Kronk's lean, clean-shaven face twisted into a grin.

"And a martyr to love, too, John," he added.

If the remains of the professor were removed later, no autopsy could disprove Kronk's story that he had died of a fulminating frontal tumor after he, Kronk, had attempted to save him by removing the growth. That would explain the trephined skull.

The world would extend sympathy not only to Clarkson, but to the courageous Kronk who, alone and without radio communication, had tried valiantly to save his friend.

Amusing, the doctor thought, as he sauntered down to the beach. He watched the slow and lazy breaking of the surf for a few minutes, then strolled around the curve of

the strand to the polished mirror of the lagoon where, in a few days, Jane Hawley's party would be landing.

He decided to make a circuit of the island for some needed exercise. For many weeks, he had been too intent on his work, and the three-mile walk would do him good. It was a pleasant day with a bright, but not oppressive sun, and he could examine some of the ant colonies on his way.

Eager to learn how the "humanized" ants would behave in their natural environment, he had liberated about fifty of the brain-treated queens, and he knew the location of many of their nests.

The first few nurseries he found empty, abandoned for some reason by the queen mother and her retinue, but after a while he found an occupied nest in a rotting stump at the far side of the island.

Even this family was in the act of moving elsewhere. Adult ants were carrying pupae away, and some of the larva were just breaking out of their cocoons, much to Dr. Kronk's elation. He was witnessing the "birth" of some of the second generation.

The young ants were rather feeble, and their chitin armor hadn't yet hardened. Yet it seemed to Kronk that they were already displaying that queer, almost sinister intelligence that set their parents apart from the normal. If so, Kronk's experiment was a masterstroke, a victory beyond his most extravagant hopes. It meant that the new brain power had been passed through the egg to the next ant generation!

The disturbed nest reacted strangely to Kronk's presence. The insects did not race around frantically when he tore off strips of decayed bark from their hiding places, but remained quite still, watching him.

The newly hatched ants were jerking their feelers with the same sharp rhythm that Kronk had observed in the older insects in the laboratory. There was something evil, malignant, in that spasmodic twitching.

The doctor laughed at them. His success had put him in high good humor, and he hummed a tune as he swung jauntily along the beach on his way back to the shanty.

AS HE neared the lonely building he stopped to pick up a stray ant, using a padded tweezer, for this meat-eating breed had a ferocious bite, well fortified with formic acid. He examined the prisoner through a jeweler's eyeglass, already sure that this specimen hadn't been operated upon, for its reactions had been normally antlike.

Verifying this, he took the captive into the lab and imprisoned it upon the stage of a low-power microscope. As soon as the doctor's eyes had accustomed themselves to the change of light, he went to work.

He examined his red and hairy patient un-

der the lens, after touching its head with a solution from a vial, throwing a mirror beam upon it. The eyes at the side of the head and in the center of the forehead gleamed like opaque glass.

The doctor smiled. Now to light the lamp of reason behind those eyes! With a scalpel hardly larger than a needle, he opened the head of the ant and deftly removed its almost invisible brain. Then with a tiny pipette he transferred a minute speck of human nervous cell protoplasm into the cranial cavity. He concluded the operation with the use of even smaller instruments, and then covered the insect's head with a thin protective fluid that dried immediately like varnish.

It had been claimed that the most marvelous atom of matter in the known universe was the brain of an ant. Dr. Kronk knew better: much more wonderful was this dot of mind that he had transferred to this humble creature.

It was his theory that all the brain power of Man, the stored and correlated memories, even the emotional attributes of the individual, were all to be found in the mysterious fluid within the brain-cell nucleus. The visible, material, structure was only the machinery of thought, the electrical network.

What was the essence itself? Kronk himself could not answer that. He could only observe it in action.

"Now I've cursed you with intelligence," the doctor said, as he took the six-legged subject to the doorway and released it outside.

That evening the neurologist prepared an especially good dinner for himself, eating with great enjoyment and finishing it off with one of his last remaining bottles of Argentine champagne.

As usual, the interior of the shack was immaculate, with everything in its exact place, for Dr. Kronk was a tidy man. Clarkson's clothing and personal belongings were packed and stowed away in one corner, along with his folded cot. The single long room served both as workshop and living quarters, with the latter farthest from the door. Ceiling and walls were covered with snowy wallboard which made perfect cleanliness an easy matter.

There were no mosquitoes, and not many other insects on the island. Thanks to ocean currents, even the climate was moderate for a locality so near the equator. Kronk had been very comfortable.

Relaxed by the wine, but with a perfectly clear head, the doctor retired early. He pushed the table with the lamp close to his cot, and for two hours or more he lay in his pajamas, reading scientific journals and occasionally jotting down a note.

Finally he yawned and reached to turn out the light. It was then that he noticed the ants on the ceiling directly over his bed. He

changed his mind about extinguishing the lamp. Relaxed on his back, he watched intently.

Kronk's first thought was that some of the laboratory ants had escaped. A glance in the direction of the glassed boxes reassured him, although he did notice that the inmates of those transparent prisons were all in an excited state, and were crowding each other on the inner sides of the windows.

The ants on the ceiling had come in from the outside. He could see the chinks and holes where they were making their entrance. And they were young insects, the second generation. This had to be true, for there were hundreds, possibly thousands of them.

And he could tell from their deportment that they were not ordinary ants—they were actually arranging themselves in geometric designs!

"I was right," Kronk murmured. "They've inherited something of John Clarkson's mentality. Except Man, no living thing has ever accomplished what they're doing!"

He had been rather annoyed at first by the appearance of the swarm on his spotless ceiling, but now he watched with an almost paternal interest and growing delight.

The red insects seemed to realize now that they had attracted his attention. For they were making new and more intricate patterns, moving deliberately into interlocking circles, triangles, and almost perfect squares.

Kronk reached for his notebook and began writing and sketching feverishly. When he looked upward again, however, he dropped his pencil.

THE red swarm was arranging itself into letters, a weirdly moving alphabet! Across the flat plane of the ceiling the insects were spelling out a word.

What was that first letter? An "M"! The second was an "O." There were four now: M-O-R-T. That spelled nothing comprehensible to the doctor.

Even the ants seemed uncertain, moving with more hesitancy than when originating the mathematical figures. More of the insects came up waveringly at the end of the word, making a rather misshapen "E." The reading was now MORTE.

"But they're forming letters! That means that—"

Dr. Kronk could feel his heart laboring with excitement. It meant that his theory of concentrated Mind matter was correct, and even more astonishing, John Clarkson's memory had been inherited by this new generation of ants! That didn't happen in humankind, but there could be no doubting the unanswerable evidence overhead.

The word MORTE had now changed to a ragged and uneven MUERTE. Then this

was scattered, and the ants came together more thickly to spell, this time, something in three huge letters: TOD.

Enlightenment flashed through the mind of Dr. Kronk. Why hadn't he understood, before? TOD was German for "Death." Professor Clarkson had been a linguist, being acquainted with four or five languages besides his professional Latin and Greek and his native English. The ants had written "Death" in French, Spanish, German and Italian, and now as he watched spellbound, he saw them outlining themselves grotesquely into Greek characters to delineate the ominous word for the fifth time.

Then this, too, became dissipated and scattered. Again they came together from all sides to write, as if in letters of red flame, this time in English and now quickly and precisely: DEATH.

Kronk felt a ball of nausea growing at the pit of his stomach. Why "Death" over and over? What did they mean? Were they threatening him? Was John Clarkson threatening him through the squirming bodies of these six-legged things?

Suddenly a solitary ant dropped from above to alight on Kronk's naked foot. Before he could brush it off it had bitten him savagely, leaving a drop of liquid fire and even the jaws themselves in the flesh, when Kronk mangled it and slapped it to the floor.

The species was large and powerful, three quarters of an inch in length, and as ferocious in their attack as the dreaded Bulldog ants of Australia.

Swearing, Kronk leaped from the cot and out from under the horrid horde overhead. Hatred for these sinister creatures welled up within him and sent him running toward the end of the laboratory where his drugs and chemicals were kept on rows of shelves.

Some insecticide was already prepared, and snatching up the sprayer he ran back and began pumping the poisonous vapor at the overhead assemblage.

A great many of them fell, dying or stupefied, but his enemies—he knew now that they were his enemies—had anticipated him and were already in swift and efficient retreat. In less than a minute the swarm had gone the way it had come. Except for the safely imprisoned colonies behind glass, the building was now free of ants.

Kronk paced back and forth for a while, then returned to his cot. He kept the light burning, but closed his eyes and tried to relax. Sleep would not come, however, and after a restless hour had elapsed he got up and went to his shelf of medicines.

"I'll take a sedative," he muttered. "Something to quiet me."

He took a bottle from the shelf, then

slowly returned it to its place. He was afraid—he didn't dare sleep. Instead, he poured a stiff drink of raw brandy and gulped it down. He felt better after that, and the steady throbbing of the surf on the beach seemed less doleful. A second, smaller dose of the liquor enabled him to laugh at his temporary panic.

If the island's new population of ants could reason, what of that? After all, they were only ants. He was a man, a superior one, and he could reason, too. He could match wits with Clarkson, no matter what form Clarkson's mind had taken.

Reassured, he wound up his portable phonograph. A little music now. That would cheer him, lighten his mood as the alcohol had done. He was about to start the turn-table when his glance fell upon the title of the recording.

It was "The March of the Ants."

With a snarl, Kronk hurled it to the floor and shattered it.

IN THE next morning Kronk cleaned out the laboratory, removing every one of the glass-fronted boxes and stacking them in a pile outside the shack on the leeward side. Drenching the collection with oil, he set it afire, and stood by grimly to make certain that not a single individual survived.

When this was over, he armed himself with a shovel and pickax, and went hunting, tramping over most of the island. But he found no inhabited nests. The six-legged tribe seemed to have altered their living habits, abandoning the decayed wood and other accessible haunts for remote hiding-places which were too well camouflaged for Kronk's eyes.

Some of the colonies were deep in the sand, but although he toiled until he was nearly exhausted he was unable to reach the inhabitants. The best he could do was to pour oil over the suspicious spots and apply a match. He didn't see an ant in all his wandering—and that was more disturbing than the sight of an attacking thousand.

But there was an ant waiting for him on his desk in the laboratory! Kronk had gone first to the apparatus which contained the remaining shreds of brain, and he had "killed" the tissue by dumping a convenient bottle of carbolic acid into the solution. His smile of satisfaction faded, however, when he saw the red Lilliputian occupying the exact center of a sheet of calculations that Kronk had tossed onto his desk the morning previous.

"Well, are you their ambassador?"

The lone insect really seemed to be an envoy. For it was regarding Kronk with fixed attention, jerking its antennae in that peculiar manner that was so puzzling to Kronk.

Was it a sign language—a code? The neurologist remembered that one of John Clarkson's hobbies had been amateur wireless. There were some books on the subject among his belongings.

Kronk hunted until he found one of them and returned to the desk. Was it his imagination, or did the ant envoy show signs of being greatly pleased? The thing was dancing about. Now it froze once more, motionless except for the twitching of its feelers.

Kronk turned to a page containing the International Code. The creature was making a short jerk of its antennae followed by two longer ones. A "W"? Perhaps so, for it was succeeded with one short twitch. An "E." Then a pause. Kronk was sure now that the word WE was meant. The ant continued, slowly and patiently, giving Kronk time to look up each separate signal.

"W-E W-I-L-L K-I-L-L Y-O-U." That was the message! Then another word: P-A-I-N-F-U-L-L-Y. Still another: S-L-O-W-L-Y. Kronk whitened with rage.

"Can you understand me when I speak?" he yelled at the thing.

After a while the answer came: "I-M-P-E-R-F-E-C-T-L-Y S-O-U-N-D-W-A-V-E-S D-I-F-F-E-R-E-N-T T-O-U-S."

"Who are you? Who?" Kronk shouted.

"W-E A-R-E J-O-H-N C-L-A-R-K-S-O-N."

With a blow of his fist so violent that the top of the desk was split, Dr. Kronk smashed the insect to a splash of pulp.

So these super-ants had declared war, had they? They were going to kill him by torture? Well, he thought differently!

In a rage he stormed through the laboratory, taking stock of his resources. He hadn't as much insecticide as he could have wished, and he hadn't chemicals enough to make more. But there were other measures he could take.

He would fix it so that his vicious little enemies would be unable to approach him. It would be impossible to totally ant-proof the shack, but even clever ones like these could be thwarted. Kronk didn't intend to lose another night's sleep, either!

By nightfall he was ready for them. He had set the four legs of his bed into a can of gasoline, and had painted the ceiling over his sleeping place with a sticky tanglefoot liquid that he had mixed. His enemies were not of the jumping species, fortunately, but as a precaution he saw that the cot was well away from the wall, and that no bedding hung downward.

Then he got into his silk sleeping-garment and took a moderate drink of brandy—the first he had taken that day. He had eaten

practically nothing for his appetite was gone. He needed sleep, and he was determined to get it.

Stepping into bed, he took a last look around. All was well. But nevertheless he did not extinguish his lamp. He could only bring himself to lower the flame a little. He relaxed and began to drowse, then became suddenly and unpleasantly awake.

Something was moving toward his bed along the dim laboratory floor. It was coming slowly, and Kronk blinked and rubbed his eyes.

An ordinary wooden match!

It was being carried, not clumsily dragged, by a party of half a dozen warrior ants. They were bringing it point forward, as if it were a battering ram, with several insects on either side and with a few others marching in front.

FASCINATED, the doctor stared incredulously while the match was brought in a bee-line toward the foot of his bed.

There was a faint plink as it touched the tin in which the bed-leg had been set. Engineering it expertly, the team carried the match, tipped-head first, up the side of the can. As it neared the level of the rim, one of the big fellows began gnawing at the red and blue bulb with suicidal determination.

Almost too late Kronk remembered the gasoline with which the cans were filled.

With a shout, he lunged to the foot of the bed, knocked off the balanced match and the ants that clung to it, just as the powerful mandibles had accomplished their purpose.

He yelled again with mingled anger and relief as the match spurted into yellow flame a foot away from the tin, and the suicide ant writhed and shriveled in ghastly heroism. And as if Kronk's cry had been a signal, a great red tide of ants came pouring toward him over the floor from three directions.

It was the attack!

Kronk hadn't dreamed that there could be so many of them on the island. The army numbered hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions! He knew that he was safe, unreachable, and yet he felt naked fear go through him like an icy sword.

A great, dark red carpet was being unrolled in the laboratory, a living rug with a hideously seething warp of fantastically racing ants! It swept simultaneously toward the gasoline tins at the head and foot of the cot.

With a choked yell, Kronk reached for his shoes, which were just under the bed, but he was too late. They were already alive and flickering with the movement of countless red bodies. Pulses pounding, Kronk

stood up on the cot, his head hunched forward to avoid the ceiling.

Then he gave a cracked laugh.

"All right, die! You're not as clever as I thought!"

For the ants were killing themselves by the thousands, swarming up the sides of the tins in solid masses and dropping in like rain. Already the surface of the liquid was hidden by floating corpses, and the layer was thickening. But as fast as the ants died they were replaced by others.

The cans were filling up!

In spite of the fumes, the raiders came on in an unceasing current that rose over the dead and continued to rise inexorably. Already a few of them had bridged the gap and were clinging to the bedposts. Urged by the driving instinct of the community in which the individual counts for nothing, but directed by human Mind, the horrible army would not be denied. In them the will to live and to carry on their species had been replaced by the will to kill their enemy at any cost.

They were boiling up now along the edge of the mattress.

Kronk's white face was wet with nervous sweat as he hesitated, afraid to jump. If he could only reach the door! But the thought of running through that moving mass was frightening. Suppose he slipped and fell in that living ocean?

The agonizing sting of ant bites on his bare feet and ankles gave him the needed courage, and he leaped as far as he could and was running in a frenzy as he struck the floor. He skidded sickeningly, struck the wall, but managed to keep his balance and hurtle through the door.

"They've done their worst—and I've won!" he panted, when he had run a safe distance from the shack and had rid himself of the insects which had invaded his pajama legs.

Dr. Kronk's self-congratulations were not to last long. There was a bright moon, obscured at times by a scud of thin clouds, and Kronk sought a place where he could sleep, or at least relax. He walked for more than half a mile under the tall palms that fringed the dunes, then smoothed a spot in the sand and slumped down.

Before he had been there five minutes he was savagely attacked, not by the main body of his enemies, which could not have reached him in that length of time, but by a small yet efficient new group.

Evidently outposts and a system of spies had been established everywhere. Cursing and slapping at his tormentors, he ran along the dunes for a hundred yards, and when he halted again he was discovered by another party and driven on.

"They're trying to keep me from sleeping," Kronk thought somberly. "I've got to rest,

somehow."

He thought of the beach, and jogged down to the shore, where the combers were breaking in a smother of phosphorescent white. The salt water was cool and soothing to his feet and ankles as he waded into the edge of the restlessly moving water. He lay down on the wet sand, letting the waves lap at the lower part of his body. He hoped that he would be able to get a little sleep in that way, but some of the red torturers spotted him and forced him to keep pretty much submerged.

As the tide moved, he had to move with it, and sleep was impossible. The night passed with distressing slowness, and he was glad when the east took fire with the dawn.

BUT THE night had been only a purgatory compared with the hellish mental sufferings of the next day. Keeping to the beach, he walked entirely around the island. Whenever he tried to go inland or to halt for more than a few minutes, he was invariably set upon by several dozen red assailants.

The shack was still held by the main force. Kronk got within fifty yards of it and was compelled to beat a hasty retreat. Faint with hunger, he sloshed along at the edge of the sea. Fortunately, he was able to secure some shellfish, and he devoured them raw.

He was glad somehow that the revolver was in the laboratory and out of reach.

"There's no saying what I might try to do if things stay like this," he muttered. "And I'll be blasted if I'll give John Clarkson that satisfaction! I'll show him! I'll fight through this nightmare!"

The thought of Jane Hawley and the seaplane, due any day now, was comforting.

Toward noon he made the discovery of two dampish matches and a crumpled cigarette in his pajama pocket. This meant more than the solace of tobacco! Now he was sure that he had Clarkson beaten.

He cleared off a circle of many paces in circumference and rimmed it with dried grass, moss and seaweed, leaving more fuel inside the ring so that he could keep the fire replenished. Carefully he killed the few ants within the circle. When all was burning briskly he stretched himself out in the center to smoke his cigarette and then to sleep.

"A few hours of peace," he sighed, "and I'll be able to think of ways to beat those little devils of Clarkson's—"

He had just been on the verge of dropping into delicious slumber when the wicked nippers of a dozen "devils" seared the flesh of his forearms. In a fury he beat them off, but it was no avail. His circle was teeming

with his relentless foes.

They had simply burrowed under the fire!

Kronk jumped through the smoke and staggered back to the beach. There was a strange singing in his ears now, and the dazzling horizons wavered as if seen through a warped mirror. Somehow he made his way to the lagoon, buoyed by the wild hope that he might see the plane land there.

There was no seaplane, but halfway around the looping shore Kronk came upon a pile of old timbers and other pieces of wreckage, ancient and decayed. It gave him an idea.

With no tools, except his feverish hands, he hastily set about floating a crude raft. Cursing, almost weeping, he pushed the clumsy thing out from the bank and threw himself aboard—just as his adversaries rushed him once more.

His weight nearly submerged the crazy raft, but it gave him enough support so that he could stretch out. He could laugh again now, and across the intervening ten-foot gap of water he taunted John Clarkson.

It had been a close thing, but he was free of the insect hordes and would be as long as he stayed in the lagoon. The sun was sinking again, and he closed his eyelids against its lurid red glare. The water was almost still here, with only a gentle current. It was soothing, restful—

His eyes jerked open, and the raft nearly capsized as he crawled to his knees and started paddling with a piece of board.

A long tendril of swimming ants was reaching out from the bank like the arm of an octopus. Fortunately for Kronk, however, they were not aquatic insects and they had already come about as far as was possible for them. Only when he saw them drowning did he breathe more easily. To be safe, he toiled with his makeshift oar until he was in the very center of the lagoon.

Kronk's numbed mind drifted into a stupor then, but he couldn't have slept long. The light that flooded the lagoon poured from a tropical, copper-colored moon. It was almost as bright as day, with the gaunt palms on the shore etched sharply against a luminous sky.

The raft was still near the middle of the lake but moving a little because of the tidal change, for the lagoon was connected with the sea. Still raw-nerved from lack of sleep, the doctor wondered why he had awakened. Pulling himself to his knees, he looked about him.

What new horror was this?

On the surface of the water near him, something round was bobbing gently, like a human, a negroid head! Not far away was another dark ball, floating slowly. And there were others!

The first globe missed the raft by a few feet, and Kronk saw, with a thrill of terror, that it was made up entirely of writhing ants! They were clinging together in a close, interlocked mass, and the whole thing was turning slowly over and over.

Professor Clarkson's brain was functioning well. He was using the currents of the changing tide, and even while Kronk stared in horror one of the globes struck the end of the raft, practically exploding into its thousands of component parts!

As if protected by a film of oil, the creatures were landing high and dry, and they raced at Kronk in a torrent.

With a scream Kronk dived off the raft. He swam under water as far as he could, then took a breath at the surface and struck out for the shore.

SOAKED and muddied, he crawled up the swampy bank, and when he had recovered his breath he began walking. By a great effort he succeeded in steadying his quivering nerves.

"All I have to do is keep moving. I can cover more ground in a minute than they can in an hour," he told himself more confidently. "I'll get what I need at the shack tomorrow, in spite of them. Their stinging is painful, but that's all—I won't die from ant bites. You can't beat me, John Clarkson! The plane will be here maybe tomorrow—in two or three days, at the utmost.

Slowly and steadily he trudged on until the east was graying with a new day. Exhausted he threw himself onto a patch of sand near the middle of the island. It was half an acre in extent, free of vegetation and, so far as he could tell, from ants.

He would soon be found, of course, but before the first sting awoke him he would recuperate, to some degree at least, his tired mind and body. Maybe the greater part of his enemies had drowned . . .

When Kronk awoke out of a deep sleep he was overjoyed to see the sun many hours high. There were no ants in sight, and he lay motionless, enjoying the luxury of this totally unexpected peace.

John Clarkson's vengeance had failed. He had tried hard—Kronk smiled almost affectionately at the thought of John's stubbornness—but after all, ants could be no match for Man, even insects such as these.

Yawning, he turned his head slightly and saw something on the sand alongside him. He reached out lazily and picked it up, surprised to recognize it as a glass tube (the length of a cigarette but more slender) from his laboratory drug shelf.

It was labeled Cocaine Hydrochloride. The cork was gone, and except for a little white powder it was empty.

Kronk laughed uproariously. The ants had

dragged that bottle here hoping that he would commit suicide, had they? Wasn't Clarkson smarter than that? There were many poisons more effective than cocaine. And even if—

He blinked. Then he laughed again. A lone ant was approaching across the level sand. Another ambassador?

"Want to talk do you?" Kronk chortled as the insect halted a foot from his face.

Kronk lay comfortably where he was, and was greatly amused. His photographic mind still remembered the code, and he had no difficulty in deciphering the twitchings of the ant's feelers. "Want to sign an armistice, do you?" Kronk taunted.

"W-E H-A-V-E Y-O-U N-O-W," said the antennae.

Kronk's thin, unshaven face twisted into a mocking smile. Then his grin froze on his peeled-back lips became a grimace of fear and horror.

In trying to sit up he found that his legs were powerless. He couldn't move them; they were like lumps of lifeless wood.

With trembling fingers, he investigated a tiny, deep and painless wound in his back.

And then the hideous revelation flashed upon him!

The ants had been busy. They had covered their jaws with the deadening local anesthetic, had bored into his flesh, infiltrating the drug as they went—and they had cut his spinal cord!

The feelers of the ambassador ant were quivering now as if with demoniac mirth. Screaming, Kronk tried to drag himself away on his elbows and hands, but there was more than one ant now!

They came in from all directions, and they came by thousands. . . .

Jane Hawley had decided not to leave the seaplane which would take off from the lagoon again in a few hours. The news her assistants had brought her, soon after the landing, had left her overwhelmed with grief. Her only thought now was to get away from the island as quickly as possible.

The lonely grave of her friend, Professor Clarkson, had been discovered immediately by the crew. No, she would not land, but would stay aboard with the collection of animals. It was very strange, though, that no trace could be found of that brain surgeon, Dr. Kronk.

"Did you find him?" she called across the water, as the collapsible boat approached the resting place.

"He's not on the island. We figure he must have accidentally drowned," the pilot replied. "Say! We did find an old skeleton on the middle of the island. Must have been there a long time. It's as white as ivory."

That was interesting, Jane Hawley thought. But there were more important things to

attend to. In spite of her sorrow she had not forgotten the needs of the animals in her charge.

"Mr. Smith," she called to the pilot again, "did you see any—"

"No, I didn't, Miss Hawley," he answered, shaking his head in the negative. "I'm afraid those rare, two-toed ant-eaters of yours will have to go hungry for a while longer. I don't think there's an ant on the island."



HEADLINERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

WITH all time, as man knows it, frozen into immobility—with all clockwork and marks by which we measure the duration of anything halted—with even the very movements of sun and wind and stars transfixed between split seconds—what would be the result? Murray Leinster gives us the answer to this in *THE ETERNAL NOW*, the featured complete novelet in our next issue. Caught by the magic of science between two heartbeats, Dr. Henry Brett and Laura Hunt find themselves living at a normal rate in a gray world of still life and immobility. Nobody and nothing in that frozen, lifeless universe can help them escape from the perilous trap. Only Harry Brett's scientific mind can solve the problem.

* * * *

ON TOP of which Paul MacNamara poses a different sort of problem in his complete novelet—*THE LAST MAN IN NEW YORK*. This sort of fantasy is not a new idea, but the way Mr. MacNamara handles the theme is distinctly fresh and novel. Joe Dunn, star reporter of the Telegram, actually finds himself to be the last man left in a completely deserted New York—and he doesn't know what to do about it. Until Julie Crosby comes along. Then Joe gets seriously and grimly busy in his efforts to penetrate to the heart of the mystery. And the final answer will surprise you!

* * * *

NEXT on tap is a third complete novelet. *BEYOND THE VORTEX*, by Frank Belknap Long, is the story of the biggest big game hunt of all time. When a traveler from a distant galaxy kidnaps a group of Callisto-bound Earthmen, it doesn't stop George, the photographer, from coming back with a living picture! Talk about ten nights in a psychiatric ward! Talk about all the big game and scientific expeditions ever sent out! *BEYOND THE VORTEX* proves to be the greatest safari of them all.

* * * *

DRAWING fourth position on the manifest of next issue's cargo is the new Amateur Contest story—*BLOATED BRAIN*, by ALFRED G. KUEHN. You will find announcement of this contest winner in Sergeant Saturn's department in this issue, and you will find the story itself, plus some personal data on the author, in our forthcoming number. Yooggl was ambitious, and he sought to steal the discovery of Professor Krex. He succeeded—beyond his wildest hopes, and Prize-winner Kuehn tells us how in *BLOATED BRAIN*.

* * * *

EVENING things up and balancing the cargo all around, there will be several other splendid short stories and a new group of amazing *SCIENTIFACTS*, as well as several interesting science articles and departments.

* * * *

REARGUARD action, of course, will be supplied by Sergeant Saturn and his circus of performing kinesis. Don't forget that in *THE READER SPEAKS* Department you will find compact but comprehensive information on *THE AMATEUR STORY CONTEST* and *THE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE*, plus many letters from fans and readers.

PRIESTESS of PAKMARI

By ALBERT DE PINA

With Civilization at Stake, Space Pilot Phillip Varon Crosses the Dread Jungles of Venus on a Mission of Many Perils!

CHAPTER I

Hazardous Venture

IT WAS over. Incredibly it was over, that humiliating trip to Mars where the malicious courtesy of a bitter people had added to his shame. For Dar Vaajo, emperor of Mars, had never forgotten that Venus had put an end to his dreams of conquest. It was over—and it had ended in failure. Mars remained adamant. The Uranium embargo stood. And the precious isotope that powered Venus' complex civilization, a civilization opposed to Mars' predatory program, and Terra's domination, had dwindled to the danger point. Soon all atomic-powered machines would stop, spacers would be grounded, and hunger would

stalk the cities where multitudes already milled in growing fear. Then civilization would crash to ruins.

Phillip Varon's space-tanned features dripped perspiration as he stepped out of the airlock of his long, gleaming atomo-plane. To him Venus' Centralport was an Eden, riotous with fantastic blossoms, which stood out vividly against the purpling ramparts of the distant mountains. Above him, the cloud-cap was translucently blue, like a cosmic sheet of sapphirine glass lighted from behind.

"Excellency, the Council awaits your report. Your plane's ready."

The soft voice was deep and melodious, but slightly halting, as if unaccustomed to speech, for Venusians communicated largely by telepathy, unlike the millions of Terrans



As Varon shifted his aim to the octopus,

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A
Complete
Novelet



A
Complete
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the monster began to thresh madly

on Venus who still had to use speech.

Phillip Varon glanced at the tiny Venusian, scarcely five feet in height. He noticed the messenger was wearing the star of a palace chamberlain upon his golden tunic, a rich color which blended harmoniously with his brightly colored wings. Varon then observed that his spacer had been surrounded by armed guards.

Nearby a 'copter, its vanes whirring, was awaiting him. He nodded and again inhaled deeply of the moist fragrant air. He remembered Mars, grim and arid, where breathing was a painful process, peopled by grim beings. The memory was not pleasant. A vast anger at Dar Vaajo's embargo seethed within him, and he shook his yellow head, trying to control himself. What could he tell the Council? True he had not radioed, for there had been nothing to say except the mission had not been successful.

Varon walked over to the 'copter and entered it. Soon the craft soared silently upwards and they were speeding to the palace. Beneath him gleamed Starla, capital city of Venus, with its prismatic domes and buildings of varicolored hetero-plastics. Ahead, fantastic in the blue afternoon light, was the Platinum Palace, all plastic. Its soft silver glory so closely resembled silver that it had been named after the precious metal.

Varon was at once taken to a room resembling an impregnable cavern of Vulcanite in the palace. In the exact center, there was a table of priceless Jadite, in the shape of a five-pointed star. At the apex sat Empress Aladdian, fragile and lovely. At her right, Mark Denning, the Prince Consort towered above her. Aloof, on her left, stood Romain, the Terran Ambassador, with just the shadow of a smile on his saturnine features. To the lower right point of the star, Cawdor, Ambassador from Mars, grinned sardonically at Varon. Sereno, Minister of State, sat silently at Cawdor's left. Beyond, the walls were lined with winged figures, the brilliant, winged palace guard.

VARON stopped before them and gave his report. He was laconic, and a bit ashamed at his failure, for an emphatic "No" had been the essence of Dar Vaajo's words.

"And so, your Majesty, and members of the Council, Mars will not lift the embargo on Uranium. Two-thirty-five, pleading an extreme shortage. My life is yours to command." Thus he finished in the formal manner.

The Empress turned her gaze on Cawdor.

Her exquisite face showed no emotion, but her immense blue eyes were sparkling.

"It's strange, Cawdor," she said in the deep, 'cello-like tones that had made her voice famous in four planets. "Strange that a sudden shortage should occur!"

Cawdor rose and bowed. The quality of his smile grew uglier.

"Deplorable, your Majesty." He spread his huge hands deprecatingly. "But what can we do?" He gazed at the Terran Ambassador meaningly. "Of course, if Mars and Terra were permitted to have a voice in the administration of Vulcan—" He left the sentence unfinished.

The Empress rose to her full height of four feet eleven inches, her face white and strained.

"Vulcan and its mines of vulcanite are to be exclusively under the administration of Venus, according to treaty!" Her voice rang with emotion. "To invite Mars and Terra to join its administration, and have access to invulnerable Vulcanite, is to invite another suicidal war. Cawdor! That I will never permit!"

"And without the Uranium isotope, your Majesty," Cawdor spoke slowly, each word dripping venom, "all atomic activity on Venus will cease, industries will be paralyzed, commerce will become stagnant, interplanetary travel a thing of the past, hunger and disease will decimate your cities, and the jungle will once again claim its lost ground. Then what good will your invulnerable fleets of Vulcanite be? And until we get a share in Vulcan, we shall have a shortage of Uranium!"

The Terran Ambassador nodded in agreement, a sardonic smile wrinkling his aristocratic features.

It was now that Mark Denning, the Prince Consort arose.

"The open Council is ended," he said harshly. "Your Excellencies are dismissed!"

Both Cawdor, of Mars, and Romain, of Terra, bowed insolently and withdrew, and behind them they left the unmistakable feeling that it was but a question of time before disaster would strike, and time was very short.

"Your Majesty, we might return to electrical means for the production of power," said Sereno, Minister of State. "It is a step backwards, I know, but it would at least prevent disaster." He spoke softly.

"Electrical means would be inadequate to supply power to our great industries, Sereno. Besides, there's no time—there's no time."

The Empress gazed absorbedly at a point

in the distance, as if in inward communion. Then she turned her eyes to Phillip Varon, still standing at the base of the great Star.

"Spacer Varon, you have heard," she said. "Until recently most of our Uranium Two-thirty-five came from Mars, in exchange for food, jewels and metals. We paid generously, and we have offered to pay even more. When we sent you to Mars, we selected you because you are of the 'Explorer' class, the hardest, the best trained Terran Corps on Venus. And of them all, you have earned the highest honors. Now, not only Mars refuses to continue to supply us, but our passenger spacers are disappearing enroute to various points of the empire. Literally hundreds of searching parties have been sent, and all of them have failed to return."

She paused.

"Venus is your home, as it is for millions of Terrans," she continued softly, her marvelous voice weaving a melody of tragedy. "Unless we can find what is destroying our spacers and preventing exploration of the jungles of the planet, we will be easy prey for conquest. We must solve the secret of the disappearing spacers. Then our scientists may find hidden deposits of Uranium, or of Radium. It is our only hope."

Phillip Varon's face was both solemn and haggard. Having been to Mars he knew intimately what domination by that blood-thirsty race would mean. Dar Vaajo had hinted as much as he dared. As for Terra, if what little he knew of that verdant, parent planet were true, he had no desire to live there. For all its loveliness he, Phillip Varon, had no intention of submitting to the famous "Controls" until he couldn't call his soul his own. Instantly he made a decision.

"Your Majesty, I beg to be permitted to go alone on a journey of exploration. Single-handed, I stand a better chance than with a cumbersome patrol, and I may be fortunate enough to solve the mystery. If I could be shown where the passenger-spacers cease to respond to the radio signals, and how far the searching parties traveled, we might find the answer we seek."

The Empress' eyes softened as she gazed at Varon's Leander-like shoulders, at his yellow mane bleached by "space stresses," the strong features of his space-tanned face.

"You have Our permission," she said.

Then, with an impulsive gesture, she took off a priceless red Panagram and placed it on the little finger of his left hand.

"Serenio will make the necessary arrangements and give you all the information we have," she added.

SOON after leaving Empress Aladdian, Phillip Varon departed from the Platinum Palace, disdaining an escort. It was almost evening, and an amethystine haze had supplanted the blue light of day. He walked down the superb avenue, lined with luxurious pleasure resorts and interplanetary hostelrys where exquisite foods of four planets were served.

Slowly, he wended his way to the lower part of the city. Here every known game of chance was offered at a price. Here, also, the warm, fragrant evening was ablaze with a miracle of vari-colored light. As far as the eye could see, an endless succession of theatres, casinos and the more harmless "Vision Palaces" where every dream of a man's desire was harmlessly induced by hypnotics for a moderate price. Varon paused and smiled.

For some time he'd had the eerie sensation of being followed, of having eyes watching him. Being a "sensitive," as all explorers had to be, he knew the sensation to be genuine. Leisuredly he lighted a Venusian cigarette, and gazed aimlessly around, but inwardly all his faculties were alert with that supernal sense of keening that an explorer's training imparted. It didn't matter, Phillip Varon thought.

He was prepared.

The flexible beryllium-mesh undershirt he wore was impervious to anything less than an atom-blast. He might be able to learn something.

And then, without further warning, a ferocious attack was launched and he was facing death!

Varon felt a terrific blow between his shoulder blades that left a burning point of flame in his flesh. The impact almost sent him to his knees. But with cat-like agility he whirled around. Confronting him was a face contorted with the "killing-madness." The attacker held in his hand a thin shaft of Martian alloy, now bent and twisted as Phillip glimpsed a pair of reddened eyes, the Martian uttered a scream of rage, hurled the shaft into Varon's face, and sprang!

Varon rolled slightly aside, still crouching. He was icy calm. As suddenly as the would-be assassin had struck, Varon had become a trained fighting machine, with but a single purpose in his mind. At the Martian's next rush, he sent a straight left to the man's heart, driving him off balance. Varon kept facing him, balanced lightly on his toes, as the Martian came boring in tenaciously, his tremendous chest heaving. Varon's left brushed aside the Martian's blow, while he used his right, long and weaving, throwing

it swiftly three times, like a cat sparring with a mouse. But the killer rushed back, aggressive and eager.

Varon let his heels touch ground this time, and refused to give way. He took a murderous hook to the stomach without flinching, countered with a quick left to the face and then a vicious right cross with all the power at his command. The Martian's features lost their contour. They blurred and grew gory. His feet crossed and his knees went suddenly rubbery. He fell with a tremendous crash and didn't get up. Phillip Varon towered above him, breathing heavily, only now aware of the immense crowd of Venusians and Terrans that surrounded him.

This attack settled one thing in Varon's mind. It convinced him that Mars had a great deal more to do with the disappearance of the Spacers than was apparent on the surface. Unfortunately, a quick search of the Martian's clothing brought no evidence to light. The Martian had no identification papers, and it was impossible to question him. His neck had been broken.

When the authorities finally arrived, Varon quietly identified himself, and requested being taken to Centralport. Night would be the most propitious time to start his journey. He now realized it was destined to be one of the most dangerous he had ever undertaken.

CHAPTER II

A Friend in Need

WITHIN the superbly appointed cabin of his Spacer, Phillip Varon pored over the maps furnished him by Sereno, the Minister of State. He should be near the approximate area on Venus where the Transcontinental Spacers ceased to give their position by radio, where the mystery that blanketed their disappearance began.

Outside, the deep purple of night was almost impenetrable. Beneath lay the immense ocean of virgin jungle that cut the continent in two halves. On the other side of that unexplored, impassable expanse lay Gloria, the greatest industrial center of Venus, and roughly to the north, Paseden, where the plastic miracles of the planet were created secretly. Varon had little concern over the safety of his ship. Its tough Vulcanite hide was impervious to anything, and here in the cabin every known aid of silence had been invoked to minimize stresses on the human body. He had set the nuro-robot, that guided

the ship automatically, at a speed almost inducing vertigo, knowing that in losing height he would have time to decelerate.

One moment he was hurtling through the night and suddenly there was no pressure of acceleration, no gravity. It was startling. He looked at the speedometer, and it showed an unbelievable figure—a drive equal to interplanetary acceleration. And yet, he felt weightless, and as if standing still. He bent over the ethero-magnum intent on reporting this phenomenon, but the instrument was dead. True, the tubes lighted, the banks of keys responded to his agile fingers, but the recorder was motionless, and the familiar ascending whine of the instrument was missing.

"Well, it's here, now!" Phillip Varon murmured, his faculties preternaturally clear as he grappled with this unforeseen mystery. An abrupt physical movement made his brain whirl and his stomach shudder with nausea. A sensation as of burning sun tingled along his skin. From these indications, Varon knew he was in mortal peril.

Swiftly he gave the atomo-plane full power at a dizzy acceleration, and then abruptly shoved in the reverse. There was a jar that shook his bones until they rattled like rice, and his tongue clove to his palate.

Suddenly the purple shadows outside seemed to dance a saraband as the plane completed a slow but tremendous somersault in space. Then he was out of control, the atomic device dead, and the ship was rushing back over the ground he'd covered at the same time he began to feel a steady pressure on his body, as acceleration returned. It was like the current of a strong wind, but it steadied his nerves, and after the first shock it was bearable.

He knew he was hurtling out of control and making a wide banking turn which, at the present acceleration, would carry him far off course. But where, and in what direction? All the instruments had gone haywire, and the impenetrable purple murk outside was abysmal. He thought of bailing out, but the idea of getting into contact with the Palace persisted. Perhaps he could, at least, report the exact locality where he had noted the phenomenon, the place where all the instruments had ceased to register and acceleration ceased. He bent over the ethero-magnum and worked furiously against time, dismantling the complex instrument and then carefully replacing its parts. It was not damaged, just neutralized as if by a wave of force.

There was a rending crash. An upheaval

as if the universe had gone mad! Then came darkness!

Just how long Phillip Varon remained unconscious he never was able to estimate. The impenetrable gloom had not lightened, nor had the "Blue" of Venus' daytime returned. Varon lay where he had fallen in the cabin, breathing shallowly.

He felt as though he were exhausted and his body seemed to be a mass of bruises. Full consciousness came back slowly and many minutes passed before his memory returned. With it he re-lived the last few seconds before blackness had engulfed him. But for the mullioning of the tiny spacer's cabin, he would have been crushed.

He noticed that the floor of the cabin inclined at a steep angle, and that no vegetation clotted the visports. Through these ports he could catch glimpses of what seemed to be a vast jungle which stretched off into the far distance.

He crawled slowly to the compact cabinet where the provisions were stored and managed to swallow a few concentrate tablets. After a long interval, his strength began to return and his magnificent body to function normally, despite the awful beating it had received.

He felt as if he'd been tortured in the Martian "bruja" where each limb of the victim is individually twisted and each especial nerve is maltreated. At last he managed to gain the outer lock and, heaving with all his strength, he opened the door. A fantastic sight met his startled gaze.

The small atomo-plane, like a tinsel toy, was caught in the branches of a gigantic tree. Or was it a tree? The vast, vegetable thing had bulbous branches, each one thicker than an ordinary tree itself, which were stretched towards the translucent cloud cap. These branches were glistening, viscous black in color, and spiked with murderous daggers two feet long. They were tortured and twisted into a nightmare of monumental size.

Phillip Varon clambered slowly out of his ship and down the glistening branches, expecting at any moment to be crushed in a ghastly embrace. Finally he gained the iridescent purple mud. All around him, at a respectful distance from the amorphous tree, a riot of scented blossoms, cloying sweet, struggled upward, seeking the diffused blue light from above. Myriad flowering parasites clambered in twisted profusion, the garlands of each one forming a death-trap to insect or bird. Meanwhile they were choking the life out of the exuberant growths around which they twined.

TO VARON, gazing upward, it seemed incredible that even this hell-spewed travesty of a tree could arrest and hold the hurtling dive of an atomo-plane out of control. But that was what had happened. Impulsively he tried to slice a sliver from its bark. It was tough and resilient like heavy rubber, almost impossible to cut.

A feeling of intense loneliness, the loneliness of the hopelessly lost swept over him. The eerie stillness of the expectant jungle was more horrible than the roar of a savage "calamar." Only the moaning dirge of the wind in the fronds disturbed the silence, and yet, in the back of his mind an idea was forming, as if his senses grasped something that his mind had as yet neither grasped nor analyzed. Was it the wind? Varon stood alert, frowning slightly. His faculties were warning him of some event which might spell danger. And now, fainter than the moaning of the wind he heard a sound a monotonous moaning that had the quality of a death chant.

..That sound came from the jungle wall ahead of him. It was a human voice, he decided. He judged the distance from whence it came as not too far off. The faintness of the voice came rather from exhaustion than anything else, he believed.

After loosening the atomo-blast at his side, he plunged into the green maze of fronds and parasites and deadly tamarask, more poisonous than a cobra's venom. He didn't have far to go.

In a shallow clearing, where a rock upthrust made a tiny island, he saw a slender form, nude except for a short metallic skirt. It was a girl. She was lying face downward, her long auburn hair concealing her tortured features. Every moment or so those copper-hued tresses billowed as she uttered an agonized moan. The condition of her back shocked Varon. It was bloated and scarred by racking "arrack" claws. He examined the wounds and saw although they'd healed on the surface, the seeping poison had worked underneath the skin until the entire torso of the girl had swollen like a ripe melon.

Whoever she was, she appeared to be dying in torture and delirium. Her moans were faint and feeble. Varon swept the tangled hair aside and peered at the girl's face. Her cheeks were flushed with fever but ill as she was, he could see she possessed remarkable beauty. The sweetness of her features, the long heavily fringed eyes, the curve of the lips appealed to Varon deeply.

"A Terran girl," he murmured softly. "What can such a lovely creature be doing

in the jungle?"

He marveled before he remembered. Thousands upon many thousands had fled to the jungles during the long years of suicidal war between Terra, Mars and Venus, a war which had culminated in the Great Peace. That had come after Aladdian, the Empress imprisoned in the Swamp Paradim, had been taken by pirates to Vulcan, their secret base. While there she'd learned the secret of Vulcanite and the entrance to the fiery planet. The jungle dwellers had never come out. They had grown to be a legend in Venus.

Phillip Varon saw what had to be done although he shrank from the task. He'd never had to operate on a girl, but it was a matter of life or death. This was not the time to procrastinate. From his tunic he drew an electro-blade, and with a swift slash laid her back open from neck to waist. Then, he turned aside, retching. When he could force himself to resume, he opened his first aid pack and swabbed the wound clean, then tintured it with "sulfaran" and stitched up the livid wound. He inserted two sulfaran tablets in the girl's mouth, and bandaged her as best he could. When he'd finished, he lifted her unconscious form and carried it to the base of the stupendous tree where the plane was enmeshed.

The heat was a cruel torture to his laboring lungs. Perspiration dripped in rivulets down his drawn features. He wondered if he could climb that monstrous tree with the girl on his shoulder. One night in that jungle unconscious, and next morning only her bones, picked bare, would remain. She would die, anyway, he thought bitterly. But if she lived, she might serve as a guide. She was of the jungle and must know the jungle! It was now he saw the "Priestess" sign, a tiny coiled serpent forming a circle with its tail in its mouth tattooed upon her left shoulder. Beneath her hair he also found a jeweled circlet of silver around her head, almost invisible under the cloud of copper tresses.

"A priestess," Varon whispered. "What a retrogression. Back to superstitions and mumbo-jumbo—a people who once knew miracles of science." The wind in the tangle of foliage sounded like faint laughter.

Although the injuries of the girl had been grievous ones, the healing lotions which Phillip Varon had applied to the wounds were powerful antiseptic medicines. For a day or so she lingered at death's door. Then her strength and strong constitution gained the upper hand and she began to make a rapid recovery.

Within a week she was able to talk and to

move around a little. He learned that her name was Nareida and obtained some details concerning her history. By accident her back had become infected. This had alarmed her superstitious followers, who feared she was losing her powers as a priestess. When she had grown delirious they had taken her out in the jungle and abandoned her. Once, when she had recovered consciousness for a few minutes, she had prayed to her gods for aid. To Nareida, therefore, her rescue by the tall, tawny-skinned, hazel-eyed giant had been something in the nature of an answer to her prayer.

ALL this Varon learned during those first talks. But inwardly he was burning with impatience. His mission for Empress Aladdian was of the utmost importance. Momentous issues were at stake. The fate of Venus was resting upon Varon's shoulders and he was anxious to be gone. Almost he grudged every moment of her illness, for without her he could not hope to find his way out of this vast wilderness of trees and vines. He needed Nareida as a guide, needed her experience out of urgent necessity.

At the end of a fortnight she had very nearly recovered her full strength. Then he told her what he wished and she had consented to assist him. Together they had climbed down the huge tree and gone forth into the jungle. As soon as they were out of sight of the space ship Nareida began to chant softly. The girl's low tones seemed to cut through to Varon's taut nerves like a heated knife.

"Enough, Nereida!" Phillip Varon's handsome face was haggard and shiny with sweat as he glanced over his shoulder at the girl.

He cursed inaudibly. It was enough to drive a man mad. Two weeks! Two precious weeks in the race against Dar Vaajo and the disintegration of the one spot of freedom left in the three great planets. Unconsciously he clenched his strong supple hands, desperate at his helplessness.

Instantly the moaning chant of the priestess, as low and weird as the shifting chiaroscuro of the swamp that stretched endlessly before them in an ocean of verdure, ceased abruptly, the echoes dwindling down the cathedral-like aisles of fantastic flora.

Varon turned to glance at the girl. Her priesthood to the Terran and Venusian dwellers of the impenetrable jungle was still a thing of wonderment to him.

Suddenly, from the virgin depths of the jungle three silent shadows floated swiftly toward Nereida and Varon. Ten feet from

leathery wing-tip to wing-tip, their scaled dark-blue bodies gleaming, the razor-clawed reptilians came with the speed of a bullet. Their serpentine necks weaved as they snapped their shearing beaks.

Nereida's startled cry was lost in the tremendous whirr of wings as the Arracks beat the torrid air in a final spurt to reach their prey. They weren't swift enough!

As Nereida dodged behind the immense bole of a tree, Varon fired his atomo-pistol, sending a continuous charge into the ravenous trio. He hit one arrack in its scaly breast and it disintegrated in mid-air. The one next to it hung suspended, for an instant, beating powerful pinions in an effort to halt its speed. Then the serpentine neck and vulture's head disappeared, and a gigantic wing fell, sheared completely off, to the ground. The third one in its mad rush, had hurtled into a tree and had been impaled by gigantic thorns. Its raucous screams faded gradually as its life-fluid ebbed.

"Filthy carrion birds," Phillip cried still white from the ordeal. "That was a close call, Nereida."

"You think so, Golden One!" There was a hint of amused irony in the girl's eyes, brilliant as emeralds, as she opened the little bag of birdskin that hung from her neck, and extracted a dark-blue arrack scale, and with a few rapid words that Varon failed to understand she cast it towards the east. She had completely recovered, although her face was alabaster-white.

"Magic?" Phillip Varon's tone was scornful. "That won't save you from their claws. I'll teach you how to fire one of these atomo-pistols—that'll be more adequate protection." He grinned at her annoyance. "So, throw away that useless bag of tricks."

"My Gona—throw away my Gona!" There was a depth of shocked unbelief in Nereida's voice. "Oh, no! My Venusian teachers have induced a vibration in each article in the Gona so that they neutralize certain evils. But you wouldn't understand." She ended abruptly. A flush glowed brightly in her face.

Varon was astounded. "Do you believe in that nonsense?" he asked her. "Keep the Gona then." He shrugged wide shoulders, both amused and irritated.

Together they moved back to the giant tree where hung the disabled spacer.

Behind them the eerie screams of the impaled arrack had ceased. As evening fell the blue light deepened until amethyst shadows engulfed them and the teeming jungle awoke. The ghastly heat made a Turkish bath of the atmosphere, and the tepid breeze

brought the lusty, primeval odors of the endless swamp. In the distance, the coughing snarl of a calamar came to their ears, as the tiger-like beast with scaly armor instead of fur stalked its prey. They paused beneath the space ship.

"The shelter awaits, Golden One," Nereida reminded him, all her jungle instincts warning her to seek cover. "Pakmari's evil when the 'blue' is gone." She stared upwards at the silvery hull of the atomo-plane in distaste, but it was the lesser of two evils. "Perhaps the 'Voice from the Air' you spoke of, will come tonight?"

"No, Nereida," Varon explained resignedly for the Nth time. "Not tonight, nor any night. Both the atomo-motor of the plane and ethero-magnum are completely useless now. Only the Voice from the Air on my wrist comes to us, but I can't speak to them."

He stretched out his superbly muscled arm so that the priestess could see the tiny receiving set strapped to his wrist.

BUT Nereida shrank back. She would have none of this alien magic. Her own, unerring magic was all she wanted. Had it not brought her this unpredictable golden giant from the skies to drain the infection from her back?

And had not the inexhaustible power in her Gona-bag made him feed her the white magic pebbles that freed her from illness and sent the cleansed blood coursing through her veins?

"No, Deliverer, my Gona is enough," she said with conviction. "I have no desire for your magic voice." Yet, overwhelming curiosity impelled her to gaze with fascinated eyes at the watch-like receiver.

There was a soft light in Phillip Varon's eyes as he gazed at her for a moment, noting the long green eyes, the shadowing lashes and the gleaming auburn hair that rippled over her shoulders. By an effort he looked away and turned his attention to the tiny receiving set. He pressed a knob on the wrist-set and the instrument began to hum imperceptibly. By setting the dial, he obtained a faint burst of symphonic music which began to weave a spell of enchantment over their solitude.

Suddenly without warning, in the midst of a melody that climbed the chromatic scales to a pinnacle of brilliancy, a hurtling shape came coughing raucously. Uttering short, horrible barks, it lunged out of the stygian depths of Pakmari. In the purple night, its saucer-sized orbs flamed red. For an agonizing instant Varon felt an overpowering numbness which paralyzed his limbs. But not for noth-

ing had he been sent on this desperate mission, on the outcome of which depended the immediate future of a great empire.

By a tremendous effort of will he shock off the coma and drew himself to one side. As he did so the titanic, armored shape crashed by within arm's length going at terrific momentum. Varon grabbed Nereida and heaved her unceremoniously up the black tree, while the rhinoceros dug tremendous claws into the iridescent mud in an effort to brake its sliding rush. A tidal wave of mud was thrown up on either side of its vast bulk.

And then it turned. It stood motionless for an instant. Its gargantuan head armed with triple rows of saber-like horns swayed from side to side. The flaming orbs were fixed on Varon as if it were puzzled that anything could outlive its onslaught. But Phillip Varon was ready. He aimed the atomo-pistol at that cyclopean eye and sent a beam of atomic fire into the beast's brain. With a thunderous bellow of rage, the rhinoceros reared skyward and plunged forward like a falling skyscraper. After threshing ponderously for a few moments, it lay still. Then the jungle was silent with the silence of a dead world. Its most fearful and ruthless killer was dead.

Then, from high among the distorted branches of the Black Tree, came a low, tremulous, ceremonial chant. And Phillip Varon wearily climbed upwards to where Nereida awaited him in the slanting cabin of the imprisoned atomo-plane. As he climbed symphonic harmony still floated from the receiving set on his wrist.

CHAPTER III

Nightmare Jungle

THERE was no sun. Dawn was a paling of the mists as the aquamarine light of Venus' day flooded the visiports. Phillip Varon stretched his cramped limbs and gazed wistfully at the sleeping form of Nereida. She had fashioned something resembling a couch out of a pile of Martian Ocelandian furs.

"Awaken, Priestess," he said, with mock reverence. "The 'blue's' here once more."

Arising, he began to prepare a slender breakfast of concentrates and the Venusian brand of transplanted coffee that tasted as if perfume had been mixed in with the grounds. Nereida uncurled when she detected the aroma of the steaming liquid.

She took her share of vitaminic concen-

trates and drank the stimulating coffee with pleasure. Her firm graceful shoulders moved with the smooth flowing motions of her arms as she combed out the flowing glory of her hair. For this service, she used a magnificent Nautilus shell she took from a receptacle in her metallic skirt. Varon watched her, a tightness in his throat making his voice sound strange to him when he spoke.

"I think that you're strong enough to travel," he said. "We must go today. I need you Nereida." His tone was quiet. He wondered if she knew how much he really needed her. "I'd like you to guide me. You'll be richly rewarded and, if you wish, your people, also, although they did cast you out into the jungle to die."

"Reward, Golden One?" Her laughter filled the cabin. "What reward is needed? You saved my life, didn't you? I'll guide you." Her smile was radiant. "Serving you will be reward enough!"

Varon took two steps towards her, but he checked himself, his heart pounding and his veins on fire.

"Then," he said quickly, "We start almost immediately. We bear east, for there's a mystery that should be cleared up and already I may be too late." The thought worried him and made him wince. "There's almost no time!"

At the mention of the word "east," a slow change came over Nereida's face. It was a look of awe and terror.

"East, Golden One?" Her hand fluttered to her throat, and her green eyes widened. "East through Pakmari? My life's yours, but don't ask this of me. For there I dare not go!" Varon detected finality in the hushed voice of the girl.

"Look." Varon was exasperated. "Passenger Spacers having disappeared without trace, and when searching parties in ships were sent out, they disappeared too! The fuel to provide power for the industries of Venus is almost exhausted and we have no means of obtaining any more. Unless we destroy the menace that is preventing our ships from reaching their destination, unless we can send out exploration parties to find sources of Uranium or radioactive minerals, another great war will be upon us—and we'll be vanquished. Can't you understand?"

In his desperation, Varon was pounding his fist on the columbian table. He noticed his wrist radio. It gave him an idea. With a swift gesture he loosened the receiving set and had strapped it on Nereida's arm before she knew what he was about. Then with a wrench he tore the Gona bag from

her neck and pocketed it.

"You have my magic and it will protect you," he said. "I have your Gona. Now," we're inseparable.

Nercida was deathly white. "You win, O Deliverer," she whispered bitterly. "So long as you have my Gona, I must remain with you." She stared with a mixture of fear and desperation at the receiver strapped to her arm. Phillip Varon was filled with shame. He hated himself for having to force her to guide him.

Trying to ignore her, Varon began to pack all the available supplies of concentrates and vitaminics and medicines, which he placed in a water-proof knap-sack. He added two atomo-torches to light their way and dressed himself in a tight, light suit of beryllium-mesh. Then he wrapped the jacket of one of his beryllium suits around Nereida. And with the girl following him, he descended the Black Tree.

As the hours passed, during their journey through the jungle, Nereida's hysteria seemed to leave her. Unerringly she guided the blond giant through the hidden solid ground that threaded through the hungry swamp. Twice arracks glided overhead, but atomo-blasts sent them whirling into the mud. The great night-roving carnivora slept during the "blue," but equally fearsome, though smaller, saurians watched from the miles-wide sink-holes.

Nereida never faltered. She slid through fronds and tangles of parasitic lianas like a shadow. Behind her, Varon strode half-stified in his beryllium suit, drawing comfort from the fact that aside from his atomo-pistols, he had one precious weapon—a small revolver-like cylinder whose supernal fire could blast or pierce anything. Only the awful destruction it wrought was always a danger to its owner.

Hour after hour they moved forward. As the afternoon waned, Varon's body felt as if it were on fire, and the heady incense of the stupendous blossoms had become a torture to his numbed brain. At last Nereida raised a trembling finger. By that time Varon was tottering on his feet. He grasped a limb of a giant frond to steady himself. Abruptly the limb flung itself back violently as a venomous scaly head, jet black, attached to a sleek, green body, reared up. Varon blasted the weaving head into vapor.

NEREIDA had disappeared. Presently Varon heard the rapid staccato of tiny voices. After a while Nereida reappeared followed by several of the "Little People," the

Venusians of the Jungle. Their eyes were round with wonderment as they gazed at the blond giant. All of them were armed with slender thorns dipped in the green sap of the perilian which Phillip knew to be fatal. There was no known antidote.

"They'll provide a water-vessel, Golden One," Nereida explained. "Now give me my Gona and take your 'Voice of the Air.' Into the Forbidden Region I cannot go."

There was a great sadness in the girl's eyes, green as the jungle itself.

"No, we must go on," Varon insisted.

He shook his head wearily. Although every fiber of his being shrieked for rest and surcease from the unbearable heat and miasmatic vapors of the swamp, his will was unshaken. Fever was beginning to rim his eyes and a singing hum in his ears made the tiny voices of the Venusians indistinct as they offered to take him with them to safety. When he steadfastly refused their offers, they grew angry. So he flung the metal mesh cowl of his beryllium suit over his head.

At that same instant he saw the "Little People" place their blow-guns to their lips. He didn't hear Nereida's commanding cry: "Don't!" But she was too late. A shower of deadly thorns thudded against Varon's cowl, against his chest—and fell harmlessly to the ground. With cries of fear and dismay his pygmy attackers fled into the jungle.

He nodded to Nereida. "Lead!" he commanded her, and strode forward.

Inwardly, he hated himself for it, and a burning shame that surpassed his burning fever made him avert his gaze from the girl. But something far greater than Nereida, or for that matter his own life was at stake.

They hadn't gone fifty paces when a wall of green rose, seemingly impenetrable, before them, and Varon stooped to crawl through the narrow opening where Nereida had gone through.

Beyond was a great stream, black as polished onyx. An immense flight of rose-colored garzas rose in a tumult of beating pinions as they emerged on the bank, and scattered grey-backed saurians hurriedly submerged in the black depths. Tied to a protruding root, a small fleet of carcha boats, fashioned of the feather-light bark of the carcha tree, swayed in the gentle current.

Varon selected the largest and motioning to Nereida to enter the boat, seated himself at the middle facing the stern. Then he rowed with powerful strokes until they were

in the center of the stream. Not until then did he relax, throwing back the beryllium cowl and opening the stifling metal-mesh suit. A rising breeze redolent of a million flowers plucked with elfin fingers at their dripping faces. Once as the frail craft glided noiselessly forward, a bird the size of a small pheasant swished past barely over their heads on outspread wings, uttering three liquid, melancholy notes. Nereida rapidly crossed both of her arms as the magnificent song-bird, flashing like an iridescent blue jewel, sped toward the jungle.

Varon couldn't suppress a gasp at the startling beauty of the winged creature. It was like a blue flame over the water and the sweetness of the three notes it had uttered were memorable.

"That's the most beautiful bird I've ever seen! What is it, Nereida?"

"The azerine, sacred bird of the gods. It has blessed us, Golden One." Varon smiled. To these people of the forests, even the simplest things had a mysterious meaning.

A cloud of insects descended upon them with the coming of night, ravenous, determined. An overpowering weariness cramped Phillip Varon's muscles, and his eyes began to close of their own volition. Time after time he lighted a Venusian cigarette to keep awake and smoke out the singing swarm, but he knew he could not last long. He nudged Nereida, now huddled at his side.

"Awaken, Nereida, we cannot stay on the stream all night. We must find a place where we can make camp until the 'blue' returns."

"Further east," Nereida replied with a shudder, "there's a hill that's hollow. It is the country of the libelulas. There's no danger, except from the libelulas themselves, for all the jungle fears them and will not go near. At night, the libelulas sleep."

The libelulas, Venus' rainbow-colored dragon flies were insects which converted nectar and pollen into honey. They had glittering, transparent wings and steel-hard stingers an inch long. Their hives, often two stories, high, were gigantic clay honeycombs. To come near them meant death, for as many as three million libelulas inhabited each hive.

Varon rowed on, every moment a burning agony in his muscles. It seemed to him as if they'd never arrive at the place chosen by the priestess. As if in a dream he heard Nereida speak.

"Give me the paddles now, Deliverer," she

said. "I know the entrance through a narrow creek. We will save many miles that way."

Silently the boat slid under a tangled canopy of foliage, and Varon saw an opening appear in the jungle. Before them was a narrow water-way, jungle-walled on each side. But he saw something else that made him forget his weariness and burning fever. With the impenetrable heart of Pakmari, a resinous torch cast a blood-red light on the left bank of the tributary.

FOR an instant it flashed then was gone.

But in that fleeting, nightmare instant Varon had seen the black, polished body of a Janussa warrior outlined in the torch's illumination. Nereida had seen him also. Janussas, the murderous black tribes of Venus' jungles!

With the alacrity of fear Nereida steered to the right bank and leaped out of the boat before it touched shore. Varon drew the fragile carcha vessel up on the bank just as an unearthly scream sounded behind him.

He whirled and saw Nereida in the grip of a grinning black. The right arm of the savage was lifted for he was in the act of plunging a rhinoceros horn into her heart.

Varon had no time to aim and fire his pistol. With a leap he would have thought impossible five minutes before, he tackled the Janussa, bowling him over like a ten-pin. But the savage was up in an instant, poisoning the murderous horn like a spear. He rushed Varon with a fierce cry of triumph, and was met by a blow that crashed against his jaw with the force of a sledge-hammer. It was as if some force had lifted him and flung him backward. He rolled over and over. Finally he gathered his legs under him and sprang into the creek. Darkness covered his flight.

"Tell your people there are many of us," Phillip Varon shouted after him. "Tell them we have magic guns—many guns that will destroy your tribe." His hoarse shouts echoed and re-echoed in the brooding swamp.

Nereida, rising from the iridescent mud where she had fallen, gazed at Varon with a great tenderness and pity.

"The Pakmari fever has made him mad," she murmured. For where was the army Varon spoke of? With the fatalism of her Venusian environment, she resigned herself to death, it seemed inevitable to her now.

From the left bank of the creek insane cries, and battle chants made the night hideous. A shower of poisoned slivers came

like a rain of death. And then the priestess was treated to a memorable performance by her companion.

Growling, screaming hoarsely, speaking in various dialects, intermingled with high-pitched commands, Varon was desperately trying a ventriloquist's trick of producing many voices. He changed places along the bank as fast as he could, firing his atomopistol. The blue-green flashes kept spearing Janussas as he ran from spot to spot, to give the illusion of several men firing.

Screams of rage and agony came from the other side of the river and more poison-tipped darts pattered down. Once the entire tribe started to cross, and Varon ran like a man possessed, firing rapidly from different places. As the blacks fell writhing in the stagnant water, the swarm of Janussas fell back, wondering if there were more strangers where they'd seen but two.

It was then that a miracle came winging out of the depths of Pakmari. Attracted by the blue-green flashes of the atomopistol, a swarm of gigantic Venusian fire-flies, their blue-green lights flickering on and off, swept over their heads and across the creek, creating the illusion that hundreds of atomoflashes were being fired. There was an instant of shocked silence. Then the Janussas fled, leaving their dead and dying behind, convinced that an army faced them on the other bank.

Human flesh can endure only so much. Phillip Varon, his senses reeling, vaguely knew that he was being guided by the faltering Nereida, as they stumbled through the purple shadows. He didn't know how long they dragged themselves out of the treacherous quagmires. At last the ground beneath their feet began to feel more solid, and dawn found them in an immense clearing, dotted by the towering hives of greenish clay of the libelulas.

Varon gently let go of Nereida's wrist and squatted down by her side. He had fully intended to keep guard, but he was more exhausted than he realized. Soon his head drooped and he fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER IV

Nereida's Magic

HOURS later, Phillip Varon awoke to a sense of danger with that incredible awareness of the "sensitives." He raised himself on an elbow and swept the clearing

with cautious eyes, it was "blue" again. He reached over and gently shook the girl awake. Again he heard the sound that had roused him from the sleep of exhaustion, the sound of many voices. It was the excited garbling of a party of Janussas returning from nocturnal hunt.

Quickly he rose, giving Nereida a helping hand, and they raced for concealment behind a libelula hive. But the Janussas, emerging from the jungle, spied them. The savages stood stock still in surprise and then rushed forward with battle-cries, brandishing spears and rhinosaurus' horns. Varon and Nereida were but a scant three yards from the gigantic hive when the ground began to give under their feet. Nereida lurched against a side of the hive and part of it crumbled into dust under the impact of her body. They raced onward now, away from mortal danger.

A few libelulas fluttered from the shattered hive to investigate, and then a growing stream of the deadly insects flew out. As Varon and the girl sped away, a tremendous roar—the deafening crescendo of millions of wings—told them the libelulas had attacked the blacks. Harrowing screams and sobbing, babbling cries were drowned in the roar of winged sound. The Janussas had found an enemy they hadn't bargained for.

As Varon and Nereida traveled east, they discovered the going was much easier. There were no quagmires, the ground was firm. Varon noted that it was no longer a jungle, but more like Terran forests, in which he had hunted several times. After a while, even the vegetation grew sparse, until the ground was almost arid and a strange green glow seemed to permeate everything. As the glow increased, Nereida began softly to chant the "Death Ceremonial" of Venus known even to the jungle people. Varon tried to reassure her, but the priestess only gave him a wan smile and continued to chant. The green glow was brightening rapidly now, until the few gnarled and twisted trees that remained stood black and fantastic in the ghastly light.

At last nothing remained but a vast, shimmering expanse of phosphorescent green that stretched before them on all sides. The unbearable radiation which assailed their eyes was like a sea of flame, coruscating in waves of radiant, blinding color. With a cry of wonder Varon drew the cowl of his beryllium-mesh suit over his head and also made Nereida protect her eyes.

So this was the key to the mystery! An immense lake of radioactive mud, like a cos-

mic cancer in the jungle's heart lay before them. No wonder atomo-engines failed. No wonder the most powerful radios went dead. Still, without anything to concentrate and direct the fearful radiations, most of them would be diffused, Varon thought.

Through the visiplate of the cowl that protected his face, he peered into this fabulous maelstrom, which had brought disaster to the fleets of Venus. Then he discerned the silvery shaft of vulcanian, the only metal that could withstand radioactive bombardment, about fifty yards from the bank. At the very pinnacle of the soaring shaft, an enormous globe of a transparent substance seemed to be filled with swirling green light. A magnetic needle!

Aghast, Phillip Varon now knew the answer to all the questions which had troubled the Imperial Council. No wonder great passenger spacers were guided to this spot and thrown into inertia, their powerful engines neutralized. He was no longer surprised all had sped to their doom in the unplumbed depths of the radioactive lake of mud. Who was responsible for this devilish contrivance? Who had satanically guided the spacers to the inexhaustible source of atomic power, only to seal them forever to silence?

At his side, Nereida was kneeling on the ground, with bowed head, chanting the sonorous phrases of the "Ceremonial."

"O God of infinite dominion—"

But Phillip Varon was not listening. He had drawn the odd, revolver-like weapon he had treasured during the ghastly journey through Pakmari and now he had aimed it at the shaft near the base of the structure.

"Only Mars can be responsible for this," he was murmuring. "Only those fiends could have compelled suicide squads of workmen to erect this needle of death."

He pressed the firing knob, and a stream of awful incandescence, brighter than the green flames themselves, shot out.

The invulnerable Vulcanite turned blue, then violet, then cherry red. Stubbornly it resisted, even that hellish, disruptive force. But at last the supernal fire from the weapon began to melt the metal under the disrupting barrage. The radioactive lake became convulsed as if by a subterranean upheaval. A tidal wave of the shimmering stuff swept upwards and slowly, unbelievably, a monstrous black shape emerged from the radioactive slime to glare at them from immense, pale yellow eyes.

It was as if a mountainous Medusa with

snaky locks had risen from the depths. Gigantic tentacles waved from the harrowing body of the Martian octopus, similar to the ones infesting the subterranean, mud-caves of Mars where the Uranium deposits, with their U 235 isotope, were found.

"So they hadn't forgotten even to place one of their fearful monsters here as some sort of a guardian!" Varon mused grimly.

Meanwhile the side of the shaft had been eaten through by the stream of disintegrative force and had begun to sway slightly.

One stupendous tentacle of the Martian creature curled around half-cut shaft, then another and another. Varon then directed his fire at the octopus.

A SHRILL, ear-shattering scream rose from the "thing." The radioactive lake was convulsed by the thrashing throes of the dying monster as it sent mountains of the glittering stuff skywards. It braced its hidden tentacles in the mud and sought to pull itself up the shaft, but the weakened structure swayed and then came crashing down.

Varon did not wait to see any more. He had grasped the shivering form of Nereida and was racing east, away from the fearful upheaval. Nor did he slacken his pace until the radioactive lake was but a faint green glow in the distance.

It was with a cry of gladness, three days later, that Varon recognized the snow-capped mountains of the Eastern Range in the distance. Blue and purple shadowed, the mighty ramparts of Venus lifted their gleaming crowns of eternal snows into the shimmering sky. They had now entered the park-like country of the "Cave People," where in accordance with Venusian Law which forbids interference with the normal development of all the peoples of the planet, the white, barbaric race of cave-dwellers led a nomadic existence.

To cross their domain without permission was dangerous. Phillip Varon and Nereida kept to the trees and tried to make their passage as inconspicuous as possible. But all Varon's caution and even Nereida's forest-craft failed them. Silently they were stalked and examined by the barbarians. Nereida they recognized as a great prize, a valued mate for a chieftain. But this great, golden giant who had invaded their domain—what manner of man was he? Surely, he would be a foe worthy of being tested in battle!

Word sped back to their chief. Mounted on the three-toed horses of Venus, whose single horn make them resemble nothing so much as the fabled unicorn of Terra, mes-

sengers carried the tidings to the rocky caverns of the tribes. And suddenly at a bend of the shadowy trail where a park-like clearing made an island of suffused blue light, Varon came face to face with a towering, muscular Venusian. The powerful body of the chief was caparisoned in leather harness, embossed in metals and semi-precious stones. Cold, cruel dark eyes stared at Varon from beneath a gorgeous plumed head-dress. Behind him a group of retainers rested their lances.

Varon faced the chief with the knowledge he would have to fight. The muscular hand of his opponent was grasping the thick shaft of a gigantic sword. Varon measured the length of the long weapon and, then glanced at the pitifully inadequate three foot thorn that was all he had to defend himself with. Varon knew most of his strength was gone. His fever wracked and emaciated body was trembling with weakness.

Then his lips tightened as he remembered the lake of radioactive mud and what it

his head and again brought it down with enough force to split a tree. But Varon again parried it with such precision that the razor-sharp blade slid off, singing, to one side.

Then Varon closed in. His weapon flickered in and out so rapidly that it barely seemed to touch the brawny forearm of the chief. Yet when it came away it left a deep, flowing gash from elbow to wrist. With a bellow of humiliation and rage that this battered, filth-smearing stranger could have drawn first blood, the chief lunged in a tremendous coup de grace, but his sword-point speared the air. As he tried to recover his balance, Varon's three-foot thorn tore the bejewelled harness from the chief's shoulders and slashed the flesh beneath. If he'd had a sword the battle would have ended.

The chief's wrath was ominous, all the more so because he had become silent. In his heart burned a single idea—to kill!

Phillip Varon was staggering from exhaustion. He stared into the hawk-like visage and found no mercy there. Before his eyes

Joe Dunn finds himself alone in a completely deserted metropolis—and how he solves the problem of existence for himself makes **THE LAST MAN IN NEW YORK**, Paul MacNamara's novelet next issue, a yarn to hold you spellbound!

would mean to Venus, harnessed as atomic-power. And what would happen to Nareida, if he were beaten. The thought of her at the mercy of this thick-skulled savage sent a wave of rage surging through him. It seemed a mockery of fate that the pugnaciousness of a barbarian chief should block the path of Nereida and himself when Gloria, the great industrial city, was now within reaching distance. A slow smile parted his lips. With something of the careless gallantry that had always marked his approach to danger, he raised the point of his thorn in the immemorial salute.

The chief saluted in return, slightly puzzled at the smile. Behind him, his retainers grinned openly. The long-haired golden one would make a worthy foe, and that golden head such a trophy as rival clans had never seen. A hungry look came into their eyes as they watched.

Without preamble the warrior chief struck, slashing downwards in a mighty blow that should have cleft Phillip Varon in two. But the Terran dodged aside, smiling at the clumsy attack. As he side-stepped, his pointed thorn flicked and the chief's sword slid along the steel-hard thorn without harm. But the chief had no intention of giving up the attack. He had whirled his sword over

floated visions of sudden death, with his mission unfinished. In desperation, once more his thorn feinted to one side, flickered and drove deep into the exposed shoulder of the warrior, leaving a wound from which dark blood flowed over the chief's bright Venusian spider silks. Perspiration was rolling down Varon's face. Swiftly Varon tore open his clothing over his chest and inhaled great gulps of air.

THE chief was circling warily now. He had learned to his utter amazement that he had met a great swordsman, greater even than himself. Save for the disparity in weapons, the chief would have been dead. A terrible anger and admiration struggled for supremacy in his barbaric mind. But he must kill—kill! Else he would not be chief for long! Already his retainers were wavering in their loyalty, and wondering what manner of being was this? The jungle had spewed him out. Yet ill and half-starved, armed only with a long thorn, he had been able to stand up to their great chief. It would make a tale that would long live as a legend around their camp fires.

The chief must have sensed their scorn, for he charged Varon, whirling the gleaming blade overhead until it flashed like bright

silver. Then he brought it down in a mighty slash, intending to shear Varon's head from his shoulders. Varon leaped back. Summoning what remained of his fast ebbing strength, he engaged the chief's blade with his thorn. With a strange, flickering motion, he twisted the thorn and sent the chief's sword flying through the air. It was the "Machiavelli," the ancient Italian stroke named after its inventor. But the chief knew nothing of that. He only knew that one moment he had thought he had his opponent vanquished, and the next he'd found himself disarmed! Mingled with his amazement was the thought that death had come upon him. Varon could kill him at will now.

"Finish him!" It was Nereida speaking in a cold voice.

At this instant there was a whirr of wings. Out of the skies came hurtling a wondrous bird of translucent blue, an azurine, closely pursued by a screaming hawk that plummeted down like a lightning bolt. With a plaintive note of infinite melancholy, the azurine flew into the open front of Phillip Varon's beryllium garment, just as the enraged hawk flashed by Varon's face. It passed so close that powerful pinions raked the Terran's cheek.

There was a moment of startled silence. Now before Phillip's uncomprehending eyes, an amazing transformation took place.

"The dove of the gods," the chief said, in awe.

Taking off his plumed helmet, he threw it on the ground. He had no doubt now why he could not vanquish Phillip Varon. In his eyes, the Terran had supernatural protection. Together with the retainers, he knelt and bowed his head.

"Go in peace, divine one," the chief whispered. "At the turn of the road you'll find our horses, with provisions in the saddle-bags. Take what you need."

An instant later the white barbarians were gone silently into the forest, as silently as they had come. Imbedded in the ground, the chief's sword vibrated in the wind.

Days later, Phillip Varon lay in bed, recovering from the fever. Nearby hovered Nereida who had been nursing him faithfully. On this particular day Varon was surrounded by the greatest scientists known to Venus. One of these scientists had observed that the receiving set Nereida wore on her arm should be placed in a museum, together with all other items which Varon and she had carried during their momentous journey through the jungles.

Nereida shook her lovely head emphatically. "I'll never part with it," she said.

"But why, my dear?" Varon inquired. "I can get you another one."

"It wouldn't have the same vibrations," Nereida told him. "This one has power. You used all my Gona. It is but just that I should use your magic too."

"I used your Gona?" Varon echoed in astonishment. "I merely kept your bag as a means to keep you with me—I hope for life." He grinned. "Anyway, here's the bag, you can have it back."

He extended the small bird-skin bag to the priestess. But Nereida waved it away with a gesture of utter disdain.

"It isn't any good now," she said. "It's all used up. Open it, Phillip. Look inside." Her voice was urgent.

Phillip Varon hesitated, conscious of the amused smiles of his distinguished scientific guests. But there was no denying Nereida. He opened the Gona bag and dumped the entire contents on the bed.


It contained: three glistening arrack scales, a shard from a rhinoceros' horn, a minute carcha boat, a desiccated firefly, a petrified libelula and the exquisite blue feather of an azurine!

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HELICOPTER INVASION

By FORD SMITH

A Grim and Deadly Aerial Menace Suddenly Strikes!

THE home base was a dream of an airport. Cylindrical in shape and with a rounded dome, it towered so high above the plain that few if any of the inhabitants knew how many levels there were. It seemed to be one continuous mass of interlaced girders and arched structures, overlaid with a camouflage of green foliage and dotted with a profusion of white and yellow tubes. These tubes exuded a heavy and exotic gas that hovered in a constant cloud around the base.

This, so Anophe understood, was a protective shield against the enemy, but she had never noticed that the gas proved much of a deterrent to the birdmen. Many a hard-fought aerial engagement took place with the enemy in the very shadow of the home base. Anophe was an Amazon flier, as so many of her blood-thirsty and warlike race were. She was on scout patrol now, purely a routine maneuver.

How long the war had been going on, Anophe had no idea. History was not her forte. All she knew about that was that it had been carried on for generations, since long before her people had migrated from the misty swamp region of this great planet and made their home on this high, lush plateau.

As she circled droningly above the home base now, she could see the low-lying green jungle—like a flat emerald carpet far beneath her monoplane wings—stretching for miles around the tower. Overhead, in a brassy sky, hung the blazing disk of the yellow-white star which was this planet's sun. Far off to the left she could see the immense perpendicular white cliffs which dominated this entire plateau jungle. Dimly

she could make out the black oblong openings of the caves that honeycombed the cliffs.

A curious race of moronic giant bipeds lived there, earthbound creatures that lumbered about on the ground and trampled the matted jungle clumsily beneath their shapeless padlike feet.

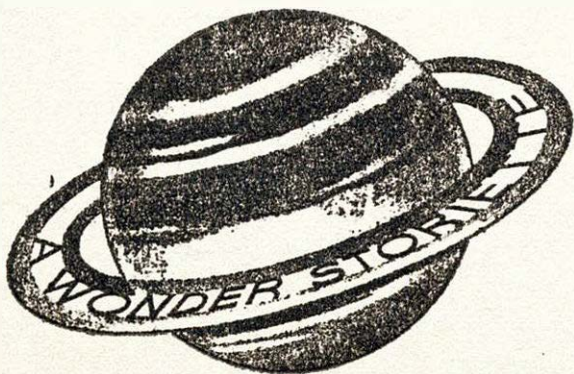
Occasionally they blundered into the area of the home base, but they rarely did any damage. In reprisal Anophe had accompanied more than one night-flying raid on the cliffs where many a squadron had drawn blood. But in the main these were sporadic raids. Anophe's people were distinctly an aerial race, and the huge bipeds were simply too gross to be handled properly as a stock food supply. So there was a sort of truce between the alien races.

It was against the more normal yet terrible birdmen that Anophe and her squadron mates fought their bitterest battles. If only the war would cease so that she could settle down to a lifetime of peace with her chosen mate. But Cules, her fiance, was also a member of the aerial corps operating from the home base. He was in another squadron on the night patrol.

Anophe herself preferred the dusk patrol. It was far more pleasant flying in the cool of twilight when the geysers erupted. This phenomenon occurred regularly after sundown. There was no precise pattern to it. From varying places about the jungled plain hundreds of fine jets of water would spout heavenward for perhaps an hour and drop back toward the tundra in the form of misty rain. Anophe had tried to puzzle this queer thing out, but she had been forced to drop the research and leave it for the more scientifically minded, as the geysers appeared at different spots with no orderly rhythm.

SUDDENLY Anophe was shaken out of her musing as she sighted one of the bomber bird ships coming in at nine o'clock. This was strange. Usually the birdmen attacked about geyser time.

Anophe sent an impulse swiftly through her wireless antennae. "Scout seven on



B patrol to home base!" she radioed. "Enemy approaching from northwest."

She radioed her warning three times, got an acknowledgment, and then tilted her nose and dived for the home base tower. One scout plane could do nothing against such a flying fortress. There was no point in sacrificing her life in vain. But the enemy had sighted her and was on her tail in a flash, dive-bombing with such furious speed that Anophe wondered why the heavy wings did not vibrate off.

Anophe was no mean flier herself, though, and she looped into a side-slip and slid under the nearest arch of the home base just inches ahead of the pursuit. Baffled, the enemy craft pulled up in a short zoom that was a masterly bit of flying that narrowly averted disaster. For a few moments pandemonium reigned. Then, beaten off and foiled, the bird ship whirred away in the direction of the white cliffs.

From the eighty-third level of the tower Anophe watched the huge fortress depart. She caught the signal of someone sending from the inner citadel of the base. Instantly she tuned in and listened.

"It is growing obvious daily that we must change our plan of campaign," came the radioed message. "The enemy are growing day by day. If it were not for our superior flying we would be devastated. Should the enemy develop our own type of ship for flying backward as well as forward, our doom would be sealed."

Another radioed message chimed in, probably from one of the lookout posts in the dome of the tower. "You are thinking of the helicopter, sir. But there is no danger of that. Nobody has been able yet to perfect such a flying technique. Ours is the closest to it."

"Ah yes, but imagine the havoc such an enemy could wreak," radioed the first sender. "A flier that can dart in any direction or hover at will, that would make an invasion of this home base simply a matter of slaughter. We must prepare against such an eventuality."

Anophe broke in to radio her safe arrival and then went to seek Cules. She found him resting for his coming night flight and relaxed beside him for a space, telling him about her narrow escape.

"But we don't want just to improve our defenses," she concluded, vibrating angrily. "We are an essentially military race. What we want is to develop our offensive tactics."

Cules surveyed her lazily. "Take it easy,

Anophe," he telephoned. "Our defenses are impregnable. Don't let the high command panic you with that helicopter stuff."

But Cules was wrong. It wasn't a fortnight before the entire home base was buzzing with great alarm. An enemy bird ship had come in the late afternoon, flying with incredible speed at the tower. It checked short on the wing and actually hovered there beside the tower, its wings only a hazy blurr as it calmly attached a slender hose to one of the gas tubes.

"By all the flights!" shrilled a radioed communique from an observation post. "This enemy flier is actually refueling on our protective gas. Less than half the size of the regular enemy ship, this is a perfect helicopter."

Swarm after swarm of defense fliers rose from the various levels to give battle. Anophe and Cules were in the van, Cules awake to the acute danger at last. But to no avail. A second enemy craft whirred into the battle, both birdmen dropping easily down through the various levels and reaches of the home base and stabbing in lightninglike thrusts at the clouds of defending fighters.

The battle raged furiously through the gathering dusk and into the twilight. Fighting valiantly Anophe flew once to the defense of the hard-pressed Cules. But she was too late. Just as she neared him she saw one of the hovering helicopters dart forward and spear Cules. One instant he was flying there—the next instant he had simply vanished.

With a mighty despairing anger Anophe swerved and darted straight at the enemy, resolved to crash that deadly flier even though she died herself. She did not see the second flier dropping swiftly behind her. She felt the down draft of air and heard the whirr of his wings too late. . . .

"

TWO men came out of the big white house and strolled across the smooth lawn, their cigarets glowing like big fireflies.

"Watch where you step, John," said the first man. "The lawn's just been sprinkled."

"So I see," replied the other. "What a lovely bower of honeysuckle you have here. I noticed the aroma the minute we came out of the house. But aren't the mosquitoes pretty bad, George?"

"They were for a while," said the host. "The chimney swifts just couldn't get at them. But a pair of humming birds moved in recently and pretty well cleaned them out."



WONDERS OF WAR



The Role of Science in Combat on All Fronts

BULLET-RESISTING GLASS FOR PLANES— Fighting planes can be given transparent armor in critical spots through the invention of John H. Fox of Pittsburgh. The device consists of a thick, laminated series of safety-glass plates suspended in a frame within the enclosed cockpit and afford direct protection to the pilot's head and neck. Properly developed, this discovery should end the business about people in glass houses throwing stones for all time.

MULTIPLE CLIP MAGAZINES FOR RIFLES— A box-like magazine holding as many as ten or a dozen clips of cartridges features a rifle on which James H. Carithers of Bentonville, Arkansas, obtained a recent patent. The clips stand vertically, side by side, and as the cartridges in each are used up, the next clip is pushed over to take its place. Thus a single loading can serve a long run of firing.

PISTOL ROCKET FOR SIGNAL FLARES— A weapon that looks like something straight out of science fiction has been invented by Ralph Anzalone of Oceanside, New York. It is a single-shot, large-caliber pistol, which starts a rocket on its way with a small charge of powder. The rocket's own propellant charge, ignited as it is kicked out of the barrel, then takes over and carries the missile high into the air, where it functions as a signal flare.

NAZIS OPERATE ON PILOTS' GLANDS TO INCREASE CEILING— According to current scientific reports, The Nazis are enabling their pilots to fly to higher altitudes by removing part of their thyroid glands. However, American scientists are not worried. They have achieved the same results by small doses of thiourea and thiouracil in laboratory experiments without harm to the subjects.

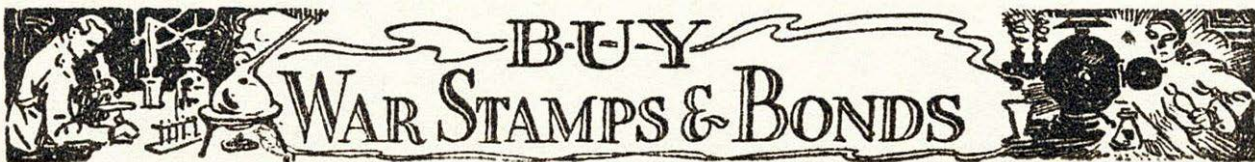
AUXILIARY LANDING FLAPS AID SPEED PLANE LANDINGS— Auxiliary landing flaps for planes to provide additional braking surface in landing have been devised by inventor Thomas Knox of Bristol, Pennsylvania, and William I. Steiglitz of Morrisville, Pennsylvania.

The auxiliary flaps are recessed into the main flaps, and in action stand out at a greater angle. The flaps project in pairs, one above, the other beneath the main flap. Large openings in their surfaces minimize eddy currents.

ANOTHER HIGGINS BOAT— Andrew J. Higgins, New Orleans boat builder already famed for his landing craft now in use by the United Nations forces all over the world, has put forward another design for a craft to land trucks, tanks, guns et cetera on shelving beaches. As in previous designs, this boat is flat-bottomed, with a wide bow that hinges downward to form a landing ramp. New feature is a water-excluding boot, of rubber, treated canvas or the like, over the hinge joint, to prevent waves from sloshing aboard while the vehicles or guns are being run ashore.

INSECT ENEMIES FOILED— Mosquitoes and other dive bombers of nature, so pestiferous in tropical climes where much of this war is being fought, are taking a KO from a new type of fabric invented by F. A. Gill of Chicago. Noticing that supposedly insect-proof clothing failed to function when it lay directly on the skin, permitting the pests to drill right through it, he devised a way to keep such insects at more than stinger's length by securing a close-meshed outer layer of netting over a foundation of crossed strips of sponge rubber, felt or other light material. A complete suit covers the wearer from ankles to pate, has slide fasteners to permit speedy disrobing and a short slide-closed vent over the mouth to ease conversation.

SIMPLIFIED OXYGEN HELMET FOR FLYERS— An improved oxygen helmet for aviators has been devised by S. A. Morehouse of Glendale, California. Instead of having the pressure-reducing bag in an awkward position on the wearer's chest, it incorporates the bag into the structure of the helmet fitting over the flyer's head, with the intake tube from the supply tank coming up behind his seat and wholly out of the way.



THE DEVOURING TIDE

By **POLTON CROSS**

Convinced of His Own Power, Scientific Wizard Richard Carr Takes Muriel Clegg into Outer Space, Ready to Create New Universes Beyond the Horizons of Civilization!



THE invaders had come suddenly and caught Earth unprepared. Moving at the speed of light their approach had been invisible. They came in thousands—monstrous vessels whose occupants gave no warning and issued no ultimatum. Total annihilation of Earth's inhabitants seemed to be their sole objective.

The instant they crossed the sensitive etho-electric barrier, flung in a network from the far flung outposts of the System, the Earth alarms had sounded and men and women moved instantly to their stations to handle disruptive screens, the gigantic atomic force guns, the radio-vibration barrages. Others dispersed to control hurtling armadas by remote tele-radio.

The unknowns were clearly beings of a higher mental order than Earthlings. They used weapons which drew on the ether for supply. They hurled walls of shattering vibration down upon the defenses. In places the protective screens of the Earthlings smashed and buckled. Beneath these gaps whole cities rocked and split up amid a million thunders. Tens of thousands of gallant defenders died in the onslaught. Those who did survive surged to other points to reinforce their desperately pressed comrades.

Deep down in the bowels of the earth shining armies of robots marched to the tune of the Armament Master, robots which carried an unceasing flow of materials and ammunition to the battling

Earthlings on the surface. If the onslaught could only be stemmed there was a chance—a slim but still a real one—that Earth might yet survive. . . .

In a still-quiet room, buried a mile below the carnage of the surface, Lester Carr worked silently, undisturbed. Though fully aware of the danger threatening the world, it was not to his task to deal directly with it. As First Phycist to the Governing Council he had his especial duties to perform. Right now he was bending over a series of tubes and dials, in the center of which reposed a grayish looking mass not unlike flesh.

SILENTLY a woman entered. Lester Carr did not look at her even though he was aware of her presence.

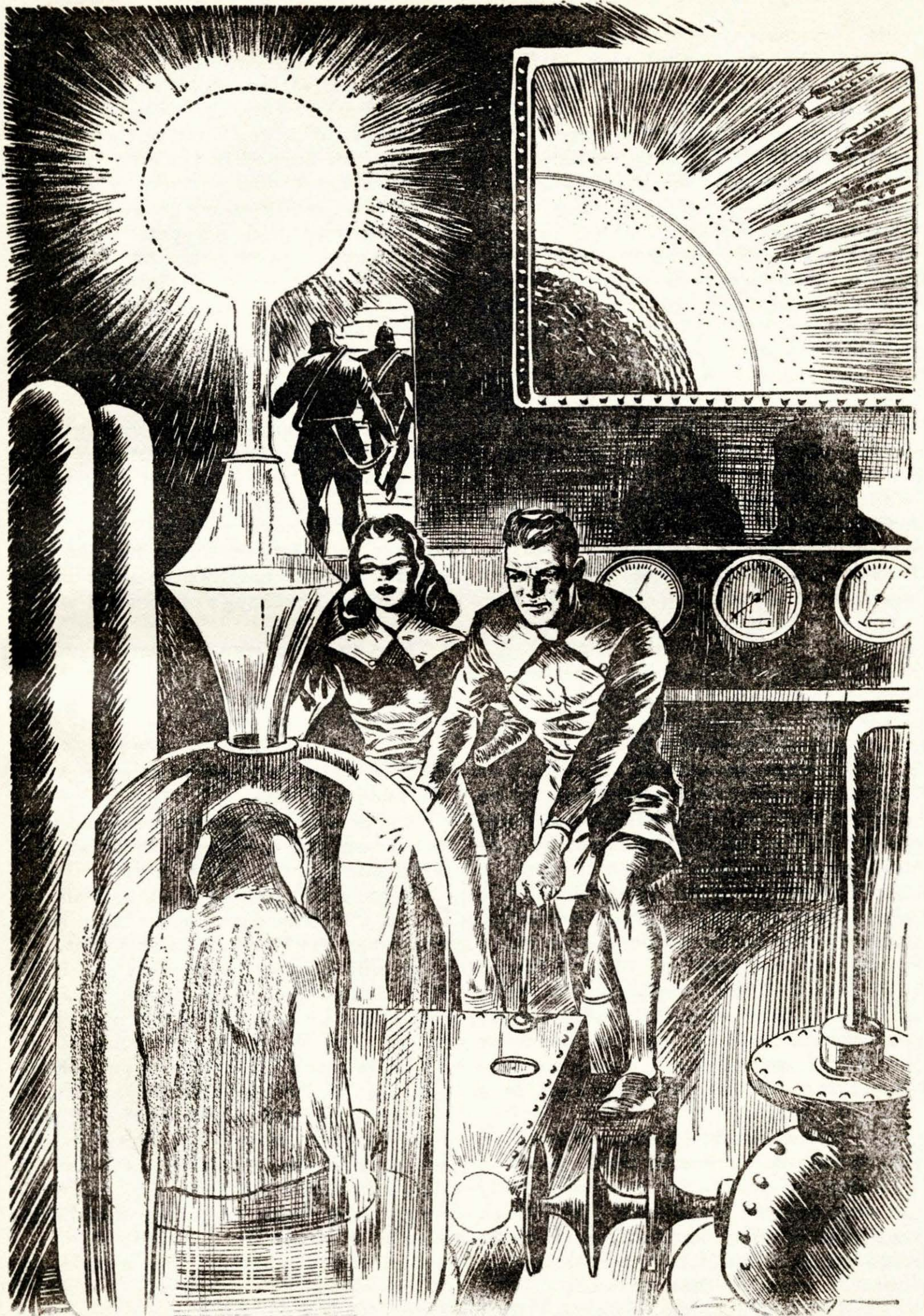
"Catalyst Seventy-X-E," he ordered, regarding the substance on the testing plate. "Quickly, please!"

It was handed to him. He held the phial over the intake valve of his strange instrument. The stuff mingled instantly with the fleshy mass. It fumed saffron yellow, emitted a choking discharge. Carr closed a petcock and looked up with a grim smile.

"It may interest you to know, Freda, that our enemies are from a planetary system which has Morcas-Eighteen as its sun."

The girl started. "But that's a colossal distance away. As far as our present day telescopes can penetrate."

"It still remains a fact," Lester Carr said. "We know the contents of Morcas-Eighteen, and since the planets of a particular sun take on the qualities of the primary, or parent, there can be no mistake. This piece of flesh from one of the invaders contains elements which are



Carr soon had the brain frequency amplifier at work on the creature

only applicable to Morcas-Eighteen."

"But why should they pick on Earth for such an assault?" the girl demanded angrily. "Why not Mars, or Venus, or even some of the planets nearer to their own System? What have we done?"

"Just nothing," Carr shrugged. "The only explanation is that they chose Earth because they felt our science would not be able to master them, a fact which they were perhaps uncertain about in regard to planets near their own home. Why they should travel so far afield I can't imagine—yet."

There was silence for a moment. Then with a smile Carr suddenly relaxed. The stern scientific authority of his still young face melted into affectionate lines.

"In the stress of duty one would think us strangers," he murmured. "Forgive my brusqueness, dearest."

"At such times as these, Les, I forget too that we are married, certified A category, and have a perfect son designated by the Eugenics Council as Super-X-A." The girl gave a little shrug of her white-coated shoulders. "After all, duty must come first. But seriously, how do you think we will make out?"

"We've got to survive, Freda. For nearly two centuries we have built up an ordered civilization of science and progress, and the inhuman senselessness of war—even from the void—must not be allowed to destroy it." Carr clenched a lean fist and beat it vexedly on the bench. "What beats me is the senselessness of this particular attack. Why did they pick on us? The only explanation seems to be that they were driven from their own world. And a power that can drive out master-scientists en masse must be something serious indeed. That is a solemn thought."

He turned suddenly and switched on the visiplates connected to the pick-up stations on Earth's surface. Somberly he and the girl watched the sky thick with the hurtling hordes from Morcas-eighteen, hurling forth their battering rams of scientific destruction.

"Unless I am much mistaken," Carr said at length, a touch of exultation in

his voice, "we're holding our own. That new Clark-Andrews multi-dimensional ray is our salvation. A bit longer and we may definitely turn the tide—"

He turned as the door opened again. It was the Second-in-Command of the Defense Force who entered. With him came two heavily armed guards holding between them with magnetic attractors a squirming, putty-gray being whose shape utterly defied all human standards. He seemed to be composed of one jellylike body, a protuberance for a head, in which were two vast hate-filled eyes. He moved with clumsy slowness on blocky legs.

"Perfect specimen of the enemy here, Carr," the S-in-C said briefly. "Find out what you can from him and report back to headquarters."

Carr nodded and motioned the guards aside. In thirty minutes he had the brain-frequency amplifier at work on the creature and exchange of thought waves began.

"Do you come from a planet which has what we call Morcas-Eighteen for a sun?" Carr demanded, indicating the spot on a cosmic map.

THE jellyhead gave grudging acknowledgment.

"Then why have you attacked us? What are you seeking? Why such a wholesale flight into the void?"

"Why not?" vibrated the sullen inquiry. "It was done before us. Ages ago, when the Black Infinity threatened to engulf Miras, our nearest neighbor, the inhabitants of that planet also fled into space seeking safety. Wisely, they avoided our planet knowing that within a few thousand years it too would be engulfed. They came to Earth, vanquished the inhabitants, lived for awhile in comfort— Then, with their scientific resources built up again after the conquest, they moved on once more. Always traveling, always trying to escape the inevitable maw of the Black Infinity."

Carr stood puzzling for a moment. "This Miras you speak of. How far away was it from you?"

"Possibly as far as Sirius is from you

—that is on the side away from Earth.”

“Not far from the rim of the universe, then?”

“Just so. But that rim overtook and threatened to destroy Miras. Hence the exodus. Nor was there any warning because the Black Infinity moves faster than light and hence gives no warning of its approach. Finally it will engulf all planets, even this one.”

Carr asked thoughtfully. “Just how long is it, in Earthly time, since the Miras scientists vanquished the Earth?”

“It would be about the middle of your Mesozoic Era.”

Carr meditated over another question as the radiophone to the surface buzzed for attention. He listened, gave a grim smile, then switched off.

“It may interest you to know, my friend, that your invasion has failed,” he announced. “The news has just come through.”

All the assurance and power seemed to evaporate from the man of far-away.

“For me,” came his thoughts, “there is nothing left!”

And with sudden, stupefying force his center of consciousness built up to a brief anguishing concentration. Literally he destroyed his fleshly cage with the force of his own thoughts!

Carr and his wife stood astounded by the occurrence for a moment. Then Carr sighed gloomily.

“A pity he had to do that. There was so much more I wanted to ask.”

“What does it matter now?” Freda cried, her eyes dancing. “We’ve won. We’ve smashed the invasion. Don’t you see what it means?”

“Yes,” Carr said slowly, with unwonted grimness. “I think I do.” He became suddenly alert. “We’d better hurry to headquarters and get the news first hand.”

The return of peace and the chance to rebuild the damage done occupied the attention of practically every scientist—except Lester Carr. In hours of duty he had, of course, to do the work assigned him by his superiors. But for him the real work began when the city synchro-buzzers announced the time for

recreation.

In his own modest laboratory, adjoining his city apartment, he spent a great deal of time weighing up the things he had heard and learned from the invader with whom he had communicated.

“There’s no doubt,” he said one night to Freda, who had followed his investigations with never-flagging interest, “that something real and deadly is going on, way out in the Universe—something defying our telescopes because it moves faster than light can travel. It is something so remote that it would take whole generations of spacemen ever to reach it and return with a report. Those beings of Morcas-Eighteen were not flesh and blood. Their power to annihilate by thought proved that. Possibly they were a form of crystalized thought, hence able to move at a speed far in excess of light. That’s the only explanation for them attacking us so suddenly and without warning.”

FREDA watched him for a moment. “But what does it matter?” she insisted. “The danger is over and done with.”

“I don’t think it is,” Carr interrupted grimly. “In these past months I’ve spent a lot of time studying the newly found records of Atlantis and Mu, produced by the Lang Expedition of Twenty Thirty-five. You will remember that they added to earlier findings of the Twentieth Century, wherein—even that long ago—it was postulated that some cataclysm or other wiped out Atlantis and other early civilizations. The cataclysm was not one of Nature, however, but an invasion like the one we’ve just defeated.”

“Are you sure of that?” inquired Freda.

“There are countless evidences,” Carr went on restlessly. “There are samples out of the sands and ruins themselves to prove that inhabitants of another world had been present. Most of the samples, according to my tests, coincide with the elements one would expect to find from invaders inhabiting such a world as Miras must have been. And the time co-

incides. Our captured friend said Earth was conquered in the mid-Mesozoic Era, which was approximately the time of the Atlantis tragedy. Obviously Atlantis was submerged by attack from space and the invaders became masters over the remainder. Then the invaders moved on, farther and farther away from—the Black Infinity.”

Carr’s words trailed off as he lost himself in speculation.

“This Black Infinity seems to suggest a hole in space—some overwhelming force beyond science to master,” he resumed. “Miras was overtaken first. More recently a planet, infinitely nearer to Earth, was abandoned for the same reason. It requires no imagination to see that this unknown horror will finally reach here, too.”

“But what is the Black Infinity?” Freda demanded.

“We don’t know for certain. But we can assume that it is vastly destructive, since whole populations flee from it. There may be other invasions yet, as successively nearer systems to Earth are overwhelmed.”

Carr straightened up suddenly. “We’re facing danger from two sources, Freda. Future invasions by races using Earth as a stopping place—and the menace of the Black Infinity itself. We shall have to prepare against the one and master the other. I must try and get a scientists’ convention arranged.”

“Dearest, wait a moment,” Freda caught his arm. He turned in surprise and her voice was serious. “How long do you think it will be before this Black Infinity reaches us?”

“How can I say when I don’t know what it is? As a rough guess, estimating the distances between Miras and the Morcas-Eighteen System, I’d say perhaps two hundred years. But this unknown thing may—and probably will—increase its speed. Why?”

“Just that I’m wondering what you can do about it. What can any of us do about it? We’ve not solved eternal life. As generation follows generation—especially if no more invasions come—the peril of the Black Infinity will no longer

seem to be a real menace as it does to you right now. We know of it, but it is to posterity that we must hand down the knowledge. And unfortunately peril loses its sharpness with time.”

Carr frowned. “There has got to be a way to hand it on,” he muttered. He reflected, pacing agitatedly up and down. “And I’ll find the way somehow,” he said finally. “Now I must go.”

The governing council, however, refused Lester Carr his application for a convention. He was listened to, purely out of courtesy, and his whole earnest speech was recorded—but that was all. Politely but firmly the council made clear to him that he was chasing rainbows.

At first he was bitter, disconsolate. Then new ideas took hold of him. For months he worked in secret. Then, one day, he returned home with his son from the State-creche.

CARRYING him in his arms Carr motioned his wife to follow him into his laboratory. For the first time she saw the machine on which he had spent so much time and energy.

“This,” he said eagerly, settling the child down, “is a special improvement on the Telepath we have at the laboratory—the one with which I communicated with that invader. You see, Freda, study has shown me that it is actually the particular qualities of a certain brain which produces genius, the ability of the brain that is to adapt itself uniquely to the incessant thoughts flowing in from space.”

“Space!” Freda ejaculated, astonished.

Carr nodded. “Jeans of long ago referred to a mathematical God. He also referred to space itself being a mathematical abstraction. Later scientists in our own time have averred that space, if not pure thought itself, is certainly close to it. Therefore our brains simply become the transformers by which these inflowing thought waves are transformed into activities of greater or lesser intellectual power, according to the brain which receives them.”

Freda nodded slowly, pondering.

"Those brains better suited than others become geniuses for that reason," Carr finished. "Such a brain has Richard here. Our Richard!" he went on proudly, rubbing the boy's curly hair. "By ordinary standards alone—according to his State grade-card—he would grow up into an extremely clever man. But I intend to make him a superman—one who will be able to carry the vast scientific responsibility which will one day be his!"

Freda's voice revealed anxiety for the first time.

"Les, just what are you going to do?"

"Use the device you see here. This machine of mine will stimulate Richard's brain with extra energy every time he is allowed to be with us at vacation period. Thus, even as a battery is sharp when freshly charged, so will his brain assimilate State lessons with consummate ease, as well as absorbing the new, untold thoughts from the void itself. He will realize where he fits in the great pattern of mortal evolution. I shall teach him what I wish him to know during the vacation periods, and I believe he will understand and retain all that I shall impress on him, thinking about those things until next vacation time comes round."

Carr stopped talking and placed the leather helmet of the device on the child's head, then stood back to survey it critically. Freda bit her lip anxiously, for the first time wavering in her trust of her husband's scientific skill. A thousand foolish yet forgivable thoughts welled in her mother's soul. They reached an agony of apprehension when Carr closed a switch dispassionately and listened attentively to the humming of the small engines embodied in the machine.

To Freda's intense relief Richard went on playing unconcernedly with the tool he had picked up. Carr watched him hawkishly, glanced at a gage, then at last switched off.

"That'll do for this time," he commented, to Freda's satisfaction. "Now let's get him out of here and start in to **teach him a few simple facts. This for**

us is our supreme experiment—indeed our sacrifice, and for it generations as yet unborn may have cause to be devoutly thankful. Come on."

Weeks passed into months—and months into years, but Lester Carr never once let up in his extraordinary experiment. By carefully graduated doses, timed to match the boy's age, he instilled into the young, razor-keen brain the whole story of the invasion from Morcas-Eighteen, together with the threat of the Black Infinity. Richard Carr absorbed it all silently, then discussed it. At the age of ten he had the wits of a fully-grown, clever man.

AT TWENTY Richard Carr was certificated as Double Grade-A, a degree of brilliance usually assigned only to those who were acknowledge masters of one or many sciences. At twenty-five he reached the sacrosanct region of Chairman to the Supreme Scientific Council. It seemed inevitable that he would finally become the elected ruler of the new generation.

Lester Carr had every reason to feel proud of his experiment, and indeed Freda too. They felt content now to stay in the background and watch full fruition—but this was denied them. A fault on the Tenth Traffic Parallel hurled the pair of them to death one summer evening. When he heard the news Richard Carr realized that he was alone in the world, the sole custodian of his father's grim warning of disaster to come.

To the surprise of everybody when it came to the Presidential nominations Richard Carr refused to stand. He pleaded important work in research and sought retirement to study out the problem wished on him by his far-seeing but much less brilliant father. Money he had aplenty from his scientific inventions.

Muriel Clegg, his one assistant, though a Grade-A student in astrophysics and mathematics, found Richard Carr an utterly complicated and rather arid being. He was emotionless, coldly **precise, with a wizardry over science and**

its mysteries that was somehow godlike. In appearance he was handsome, and to hear him talk was to be aware of a calm, self-centered ego which was little short of exasperating. He treated the pretty brunette Muriel as a well precisioned machine, utterly blind to the admiration—slowly deepening to affection—which she had for him.

In his laboratory one evening he seemed to forget that the girl was even present and talked half to himself.

"There is only one explanation for the Black Infinity. The Universe, as we know it, began from the explosion of a gigantic primal atom, its matter rushing outwards from the central core to form the expanding universe. We, of the Universe, and all other matter in it, are the parts of the initial explosion. But outside of the Universe—and inside it, the central core from which the primal atom exploded—there is nothing. A non-space time . . ."

Carr stopped, meditating, and then went on. "The Universe is expanding—that is already acknowledged. But mathematics postulate that there must come a time when the inner explosion will overtake the outward expansion. That means that the inner core of non-space time will overtake the exploded matter at colossal speed. Faster than light, therefore faster than matter itself can move. Matter itself is being engulfed by non-space-time! And this non-space-time expansion, moving with resistless, awful speed will eat through all matter until it joins the equal state of non-space-time existing outside the universe.

"Nothing," Carr finished hopelessly, "can stop it. Now we know why those scientists fled. They could no more defeat the laws of celestial mechanics than I can. Soon the others will flee the devouring tide. Betelgeuse, Sirius, Alpha Centauri. They will use Earth as a temporary haven no doubt, and vanquish us if they can. Then again they will flee as Earth itself comes into the danger line. The whole Universe must ultimately be swallowed up. It will be forced back into the state of non-space-time that existed before matter was."

Muriel Clegg stared at him, the immensity of his conception slowly filtering into her mind. At length his burning eyes sought her own.

"How did it all begin?" he whispered. "Whence came this primal atom that now threatens us with destruction because its power is less swift than the non-space-time which bore it? If it began once, it can, perhaps, begin again."

HE broke off, and with characteristic suddenness said,

"That will be all for now," he said. "I must see the Defense Council immediately."

Carr had little difficulty in convincing the Defense Council of coming invasion once he had outlined his theory. And sure enough it came, two months later.

As on that other distant occasion the alarm shield gave the initial warning of imminent danger. Richard Carr answered it by issuing vital instructions. Weapons, terrible indeed, devised by his own brilliant mind, came into being. Then, satisfied that the invaders would get all they had asked for, he retreated to his laboratory, and took Muriel Clegg with him. Then he threw a switch which entirely inclosed the place in a shell of protective energy.

Even so the girl was somewhat fearful.

"What happens," she asked, as Carr stood brooding over a sheet of equations, "if they succeed in breaking through the barrier weapons?"

"They won't. They're not dealing with material things, but with transfigurations." Carr switched on the external screens and he and the girl stood watching fixedly as, without any sign of fire or blasting, the invading machines just vanished into thin air while trying to attack. It was an uncanny sight, as though they had been sidetracked into another dimension.

"The basic energy quanta of those ships," Carr said, "is rendered void because the mathematical postulations making them up are being canceled out. My weapons are based on the probability waves of the electron, incorporating nine dimensions."

He switched off again, pondered, and then saw the girl's eyes were upon him. She asked a coldly logical question.

"If you've invented such a mighty barrier why surround this place with a force shield?"

"Because I'm not fool enough to expect an absolute exactitude in my mathematical barrier. I had to devise it hurriedly. It may not be an exact composite. The force shield here is to keep away all intruders. I've vital work to do."

He swung to the bench, but at the identical moment the radio signaled sharply. He switched on. To his surprise Defense Controller Menrose's face appeared on the teleplate, and it was worried.

"Carr, they're getting through."

Carr gave an incredulous gasp. "It's impossible."

"Fact remains that they are and we've got to drop back on our normal defense weapons. God knows how we're going to hold out. You'd better figure out what's wrong, if it isn't too late."

Carr switched off, and stared perplexedly before him for a moment. Then he gave a start at a thunderous roar from outside. A titanic invading machine swept low over the city, dropped a complete salvo of incredibly destructive bombs.

Through the window Carr and the girl watched the Fifth and Sixth Traffic Parallels blow out in cascades of tumbling metal. The laboratory window shook violently in its frame.

"It means," Carr breathed, clenching his fist, "that these creatures are cleverer than I." He stared at the horde of machines pouring through the gap in the invisible screen. "They have worked out a system of counter-mathematics to destroy the barrier. That means—"

"We face destruction because of their immense intellect?" the girl asked bitterly. "That's the truth, isn't it?"

"Perhaps." Carr's lips tightened. "But this Earth is ours, and knowledge was given to me to try and save it. Somehow I am going to— At least save those worth saving. Quickly, come with me."

HE PRESSED a button and a slide opened in the metal floor. Cold light gushed up from below. The girl followed Carr along a flight of steps to an elevator. Thence they traveled down into the bowels of the earth itself for nearly a mile. Finally they came out into an underground wilderness of science.

The girl had never been here before. She gazed round on glittering crystallike engines, mighty coils, banks of tubes, flat platforms, vacuum globes— She swung, speechless with amazement, as Carr closed the insulated slide leading to the surface elevator.

"We're safe enough here," he said. "The force shield protects the upper laboratory, and therefore this place down here. This laboratory is essential. Its machinery is valuable."

He did not attempt to explain it there and then, however. Instead he looked at the girl with a meditative gaze.

"Muriel," he said, "in a short time the invaders will beat us. Blood and toil will be offered by our people, yes—but final destruction is inevitable except for the few. And for them only a little while until the Black Infinity comes. I begin to see that I can never save Earth. But at least I can hope to create a better world on which the survivors can start again."

The girl's expression showed that she did not understand. He went on in a dead level voice.

"Once I realized what had gone wrong out there in space—that it was the encroachment of non-space-time, I set to work to determine what created the Universe in the first place. I was led to the absolute conclusion reached by Jeans long ago—namely, it was willed into being, perhaps by a super-scientist, or just as possibly by quite an ordinary being. In a sea of non-space-time thought would produce, tangible vibrations from which matter itself, would be born. A primal atom would be formed. You understand that?"

"I—I think so," the girl hesitated. "But where does it get us? How does it stop the outflowing of—"

"It doesn't. Nothing can. The Universe we know is doomed to extinction. When the inner core of non-space-time reaches the outer waste of non-space-time matter will cease to exist. But, if a Universe was created by thought back in the unimaginable past, so it can be again. By me!"

The girl was silent at that. She saw the light of intense ego burning in Carr's eyes. Already he imagined himself a god.

"I have this apparatus to finish," he concluded. "I shall complete it in time because I must. You cannot help me in its construction but you can attend to the lesser details—food, comforts, every report of the battle above our heads. I have to concentrate."

When the certainty of defeat was finally realized a call for help reached the laboring, sleepless, superhumanly active scientist. He was in the midst of the final assembly of his queer and complicated machinery when Muriel Clegg reported a weak signal from somewhere about fifty miles away, underground. She made the announcement rather uneasily, fearful of disturbing Carr's thoughts.

To her relief he nodded and hurried over to make full contact. Transmission was bad but just audible. The visiplate was out of action completely.

"Yes, yes, I know," he said curtly, after listening to the doleful recounting of events on the surface. "We're beaten—just as I expected we would be. Anytime now the victors will drive downward after us. That doesn't concern me. What does concern me is that we can leave a doomed world to them and, instead, start to make a universe of our own."

A VOICE squawked hysterical protests, and he paused, his face clouding as he listened.

"What kind of fools are you? I'm offering you the chance to be as gods. I am giving you the opportunity to create worlds at will—and you say such ideas usurp creation, destroy the power of the All Being who is acknowledged artisan

of the whole universe." Carr's mouth hardened. "There isn't such a being. It is a fallacy handed down through millennia. Heredity? Any man, if he be a scientific genius, can become a god. I can become a god!"

The transmitted reply became a little clearer.

"Your words are reaching us distinctly now, Carr. We are separated from you by fifty miles of solid rock. We have no tools to break our way out even if we wished. You cannot reach us, or we you—"

"I can reach you," Carr interrupted. "If I want to."

"If you want to!" echoed the voice. "You've got to! You must devise new weapons for us and recast your mathematical barrier. The Earth is ours and we still want to defend it."

"Fools, the lot of you," Carr retorted contemptuously. "No power can save Earth now. The outflowing core of non-space-time will in any event soon annihilate it. That is what I am fighting. Oh, why are you so blind? Don't you see what I offer you? The chance to create another universe out of non-space-time. I know it can be done. If you are willing to come in on this last adventure—take over a world of your own creating within this as yet unborn universe—just say the word. I will find a way for you to get here to my machinery."

There was a long silence, presumably while the views of the people were sought. Then the voice resumed.

"No, Carr, you speak of science beyond human reach. There are certain limits beyond which a man's domination may not go."

Furiously Carr snapped off the switch and stalked back to his apparatus.

"Imbeciles," he breathed hotly, fingering his massive machine. "Clods! I give them omniscience, and they prefer to fight like moles against impossible odds. Was it for this that my father made me into a genius? That I should find a way out and have none with the wit to follow me?"

"Perhaps," Muriel Clegg said slowly,

"your father did not realize that you would reach so far."

He relaxed slowly, staring at her. Savagely he caught her arm.

"Do you mean by that that you mistrust me, too?"

"No, I don't mistrust you," she answered frankly. "I know you to be the greatest scientist of this day and age. But I can still remember also that you are flesh and blood like the rest of us and not the omnipotent deity you would like to think yourself. Man cannot create universes, populate them, feed them, control them."

"Equations don't lie, woman," he screeched.

"Perhaps not, but if you execute the sum total of those equations you'll have a price to pay." The girl's voice was quiet. She faced his obvious fury without flinching. "Universes are the work of God, whom all obey and few understand. You propose to defy God, and that is something I don't dare contemplate."

Carr straightened up and released her arm abruptly.

"You're as earthbound as the rest of them. You have no sense of real science. I am doing what I know to be right. I am perpetuating the glorious cause of Earthly science elsewhere, starting a universe afresh."

"For what?" Muriel asked colorlessly. "A material universe will only evolve and then it will die, as this one is doing. It will leave everything unexplained, as this one has done. We will be blotted out before we even get a chance to understand it."

THE young scientist nodded in agreement.

"That is the point," he cried, trying to infuse her with something of his own dynamic fire. "If however— I—or we— create a new universe we shall start from that point and work up. So we lay the foundation for a new and mightier upward climb."

"I cannot believe it," she said seriously. "What I have learned of physics tells me that, so long as you are material, so long

as matter is in existence, you are bound to operate along false laws. You cannot start a Universe where another one left off. Cosmic cyclism insists that the chain is birth, maturity, death, and nothing—not even you—can ever alter it."

"At least I shall try." Carr breathed. "Don't you see?"

She said nothing and so he turned back to his machinery. For perhaps another two hours he labored, unmindful of the girl. Then at a sudden series of vast concussions he looked up sharply.

"The invaders," Muriel said quietly. "The last screen just went blank as they smashed surface contact. I saw them attacking the outer valves. Before long they'll be down here."

Carr hurried over to her, caught her shoulders.

"Muriel, I beg of you, come with me. I know I'm right. You have been so close to me through everything. You are the only one I feel I can trust. I have come nearer to loving you than anybody else I have ever known. I'll give you— What will I not give you, if you'll come . . ."

She shook her head slowly. "No. I feel that when everything is added up I'll be higher up the ladder to salvation than you."

"You blind, ignorant little fool!" he exploded. "Oh, why is it my lot to be cursed with numbskulls for associates? You choose death, like those other purblind idiots. Within an hour the invaders will be down here to destroy you—and I offer you eternal life. In any case doom is inevitable while you stay on Earth."

For a second or two he saw the shadow of a doubt in her eyes.

"I won't let you sacrifice yourself," he cried. "I need you—even if only for the possibility of mating and starting a new race on a world as yet unborn. Science demands that you come."

She gave a little gasp of alarm as his hold on her shoulders tightened suddenly. Without giving her the chance to reply he whirled her to the footplate of his giant machine. She clung to him helplessly, speechless. He gave that

grim smile—that smile of rocklike assurance—and reached out to the controlling switches.

Even as he did so the noise in the outlet valves to the surface increased into terrific clangor. Then it was gone!

Blank nothingness fell upon Carr and the girl, a blankness born of the sudden blasting and total construction of all physical attributes. He no longer held the girl. Instead neither of them had bodies at all. Nothing was present except a sense of headlong motion as the faster-than-light postulations of his strange mathematical machine hurled them headlong through the infinite.

Within seconds, as it seemed to him, he was through the narrow limits of the woefully contracted Universe—hurtled out beyond into the formless space-time minus, where no matter was, where there was naught but the primal dark.

Since thought was no longer pinned by material incumbrances Carr realized that he was free.

He thought of Muriel Clegg and the fierce compulsion behind his wordless call brought her to him.

"Free thoughts in a free space," his thoughts cried. "Nothing to hold us. To us falls the vast honor of creating a Universe. Think! Concentrate! Interlocking thought vibrations must bring matter into being. We will create the primal atom."

CONVINCED of his titanic authority and power, he concentrated with all the scientific knowledge at his command. He felt too the weaker impact of the girl's mind. Before them something formed out of the grayness, fashioned by thought itself impinging on non-space-time.

It grew, expanded outward, became the trembling primal atom of a new Universe. It exploded with bewildering impact, creating of itself mighty suns and nebulae . . .

The thought-entity which had been Richard Carr watched intently with omnipotent eyes—than as the matter

formed into the gradual birth of an expanding Universe a strange fear tugged his mind. Memory was slipping! He was commencing to forget!

"Muriel!" he concentrated desperately. And he wondered why he felt comforted to find that she was near. "Muriel, something is wrong. We have created a Universe. When planets have cooled—no matter how long it may be—we could have gone to one of them, created a race of mighty scientists. But I am forgetting. Why? Why? What is wrong with my reasoning? Muriel, answer me!"

His intelligence was slipping so fast he could hardly grasp her reply.

"We have created the Beginning—not a new Beginning, as you had expected. Your thoughts and mine formed this Universe—and that was only possible in non-space-time. But now normal space time has again been created, all its laws are operative, too. And you and I are compelled to obey them. It is the eternal law of physics, Richard. All the upward climb you and I have made—all the climb through our ancestors from the primal amoeba counts for nothing. Death would have been so much easier. We would still have stood a chance. Here we have none, for we have gone back to the core of the Beginning. Here we shall remain, all knowledge stripped from us, all to be relearned as we slowly climb again."

But her words had lost meaning for Richard Carr. Ego, masterful science, the longing to be a god, the ability to create and master a Universe—they had been grand dreams, all gone. Muriel had gone too, whirled back into a remote primality.

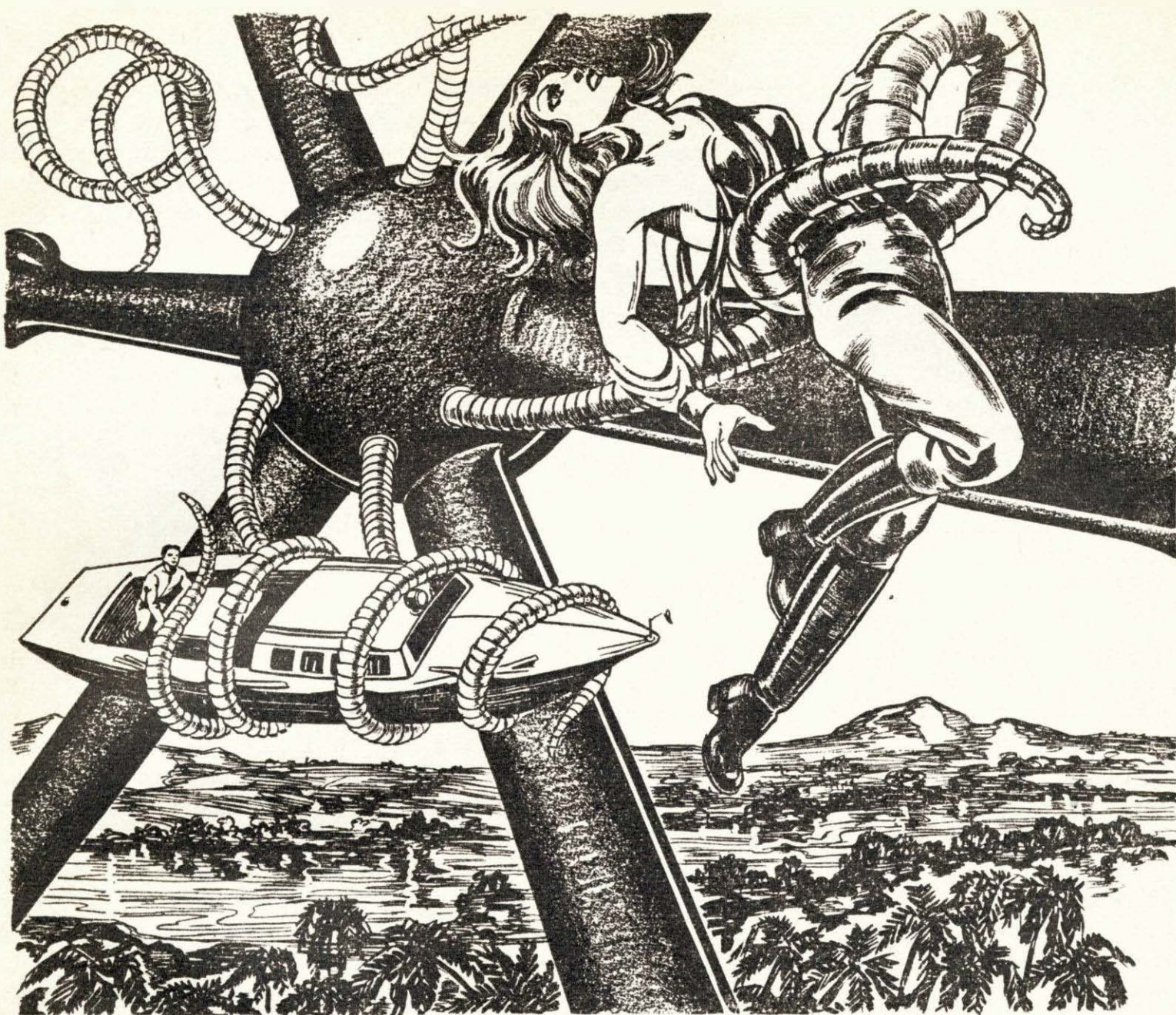
Now he had no other awareness beyond that of dull waiting. Waiting for the dawn of life when he could again begin to clumb!

Like an echo from a lost infinity he seemed to remember something, a text had it not been?

No Other Gods Before Me!

But the rest was blotted out in the unknown.

●
THE ETERNAL NOW, Novelet by MURRAY LEINSTER, Coming Next Issue!



As purple cables drew the launch to the hub of the wheel, Jim Murray saw Valaire go hurtling through the air

GOD OF LIGHT

By LLOYD ARTHUR ESHBACH

The Weird Menace of an Unearthly Visitor Plagues Jim Murray and Valaire Buchanan in the Brazilian Jungle!

LOWERING his machete, big Jim Murray stared through narrowed eyelids into the thicket before him. A delicate violet mist pervaded the jungle, transforming the hazy, gray-green shadow world into something alien and unearthly. He turned his gaze upward—and through a momentary rift in the leafy roof of the jungle he caught a glimpse of the Sky. It was a clear violet.

Murray grinned wryly. It was not enough that he had had to forsake the comparative coolness of the *Recreio Popular* back in Remate de Males to hack his way through this Brazilian jungle. Now he had to run into this. And all because of a blonde!

Narrowly he glanced toward the figure at his elbow, and his eyes glinted with involuntary approval. She was not

as immaculate as she had been when they left the bank of the Javary River two hours before, but she was still easy on the eyes. He noted with perverse satisfaction that her white sport shirt and olive drab breeches were beginning to show the effects of the jungle journey. Little wonder, for despite the stifling heat, her machete rose and fell with a rhythmic regularity.

As though aware of his scrutiny, Valaire Buchanan turned abruptly, her hazel eyes meeting his gray ones with disconcerting steadiness.

"Looks as though the natives knew what they were talking about," Murray said, "when they told us this country was taboo." He gestured toward the violet-cloaked jungle before them. "This whole set-up's crazy. First the sky turns purple—then radio transmission and reception fails in half of Brazil—and now even the air in the jungle is turning violet!"

Valaire Buchanan barely glanced in the direction he indicated and then spoke in quiet tones.

"I knew we'd find this," she said. "And it's only the beginning. Yesterday I flew over the 'Diamond Queen.' I've done it before, just to see Dad's mine from the air—and knowing that he was going to visit the property today to check on the reason for the lack of diamond shipments and reports during the last two weeks, I decided to look things over." She inhaled deeply, and a look of fear flashed into her eyes. Momentarily fright broke through her self-control.

"There is no 'Diamond Queen'!" she exclaimed.

SHE paused. Anxiety and concern settled upon her lovely face. Murray waited without interruption. Her next words came suddenly in a rush.

"I didn't see much," she said. "But where the mine had been I saw a tremendous circular pit, and out of the pit rose clouds of purple mist—mist that seemed to stain the sky above it. I caught a glimpse of some gigantic glowing thing at the bottom of the pit as I circled over it. Then something—perhaps the mist—

seemed—" she groped for words—"seemed to wrap itself around my brain—luring me—drawing me. It was horrible! I had to fight to keep from sending the plane into a dive down into that pit!"

"If the impulse was so strong," asked Murray, "how did you manage to overcome it?"

"I can't explain it," said the girl. "Somehow I tore free of the awful temptation and flew back to the field at Rio. I didn't know what to do. To fly to Remate de Males was impossible, for there's no landing field nearby. I tried 'phoning to Dad and couldn't get a call through. Radio communication was dead, so my best hope was to try and reach him myself. I missed him by hours. . . . But—he must be stopped!"

Murray nodded grimly.

"That's where I fit into the picture," he said. "This short-cut through the bush should do the trick. Lucky I was waiting around to see your father. Too bad you couldn't hire a few brown boys, though, instead of a freelance mining engineer hunting a job. You'd be moving faster now. Personally I'm glad the natives turned out to be so superstitious. This promises to be mighty interesting."

He turned and his powerful arms swung his machete into the thorny bushes before him.

"What are we waiting for?" he asked her.

Despite the increased vigor of his attack, their progress seemed maddeningly slow to Jim Murray. The jungle seemed to have a will of its own, bending every effort toward holding them back. Immense, thick-rooted trees rose everywhere to support the shadowed, leafy ceiling. Lianas spiraled around them like crazy, broken springs out of some huge, mad clock. Giant vines, writhing like snakes from the lower branches of the trees, combined with the undergrowth to form an almost impenetrable barrier. And it was hot—terribly hot. A steaming, miasmatic heat that had the sodden effect of a Turkish bath, that made Murray's whipcord breeches and leather puttees almost unbearable. A reeking, buzzing,

droning, vegetable hell, tinted an incredible violet, suggesting the landscape of another world!

They paused after a time to rest and to refresh themselves with water from their canteens. In the comparative quiet, Murray thought he heard the distant rumble of thunder. He listened curiously, doubt in his mind. It did not exactly sound like thunder; the rumble was somehow metallic, and it seemed nearby, for it was interrupted now and again by a faint sucking sound, as though a huge boot were being pulled out of a mud-bank. It faded, then vanished.

"Odd," Murray said. Then he turned again to the interminable task of slashing a path through the undergrowth.

Gradually the jungle thinned, grew swampy, and the blazing heat of the sun drove down through gaps in the foliage in concentrated beams. Drove down out of a sky of brilliant violet. Before them, through the brush, they saw a stretch of open plain, thick with grass hummocks and frequent scum-covered pools. Here and there a lone tree raised its head, and on the far edge of the open ground loomed the green border of the jungle.

Murray stared into the dancing waves of heat that rose from the malodorous surface of the savanna, his eyes searching for the best path to follow. A frown appeared on his face. Something strange out there. It looked as though a geometrically perfect design had been punched into the mud. It was no more than twenty feet away. Curiously he moved toward it, the girl at his side.

They paused at the edge of the strange depression, and Jim Murray felt the hair rising on the cringing skin of his neck. The thing before them looked like a footprint—but that was ridiculous! What could make a footprint six feet broad! It was fully that wide and shaped like an open umbrella—an umbrella with six ribs. It was perfectly smooth, except where the ribs had pressed deeper into the muck. And the surface of the print was a good two feet below the level of the plain!

Valaire Buchanan spoke. Her voice was hushed and her face was drained of

color. "It is the track of the thing that destroyed the mine," she gasped.

Murray laughed shortly—and was startled by the unnatural sound of his own voice. He had thought of the same thing—but by human standards it would take a monster forty feet tall to make a print of that size. And there was only one print. . . . Unless. . . .

HE SCANNED the ground around him, and suddenly he saw, about twenty feet to one side, a second umbrella-shaped depression. And beyond that, another, all in perfect alignment!

Murray was an experienced big game hunter. He looked down at the print at his feet, and his eyes widened. The track had been pressed into the moist soil of the savanna—and only now was the water beginning to seep into the deeper parts of the print!

Minutes before, whatever had made that mark had passed that way. Grimly Murray wondered if it could have passed with the rumble of rolling thunder broken by sucking sounds of whatever had made these huge depressions.

He turned to Valaire Buchanan.

"This gets more interesting all the time," he said. "It strikes me speed is what we need right now. Let's continue to investigate."

Briskly he stalked across the swampy plain, avoiding treacherous quagmires, and generally following the course of the great tracks leading toward the jungle. The girl followed a foot or two behind him. At the edge of the wilderness they found another of the strange prints, with bushes and saplings pressed into the earth, like flowers in a book. For a silent moment man and girl stood gazing at the mark, striving to visualize the gigantic thing that had made it. Then with Valaire at his side they resumed their laborious progress through the jungle.

Relentlessly Murray drove himself, thought of everything thrust from his mind but their goal and the strange things he had seen. The violet sky—footprints that were too immense to be footprints—yet could not possibly be anything else. . . . The strange silence of all

radios—Val's glimpse of a great pit where a diamond mine had been. . . . Whatever the cause of all this, it was big.

They reached another of the umbrella shaped depressions and paused to rest for a moment on a level spot. Both man and girl were bathed in perspiration, and Murray saw with sudden contrition that the girl was close to collapse.

"Our trip has been too tough on you, Miss Buchanan," he protested, "From now on you'd better take things easy. After all it isn't a woman's job. Perhaps I shouldn't have let you—"

He broke off abruptly as the crack of a rifle shot slashed through the keening hum of jungle noises. A pause—then another. They came from their left, in the direction of the river.

Both waited, nerves straining. Then faintly Murray thought he heard, mingled with the jungle noises, a snapping and crunching like the sound of a man walking through dry faggots, but on a greatly magnified scale. With it came the low rumble of thunder. It ended in moments, absorbed by the multitude of sounds.

A SMALL, strong hand gripped Murray's arm. He turned and met the stare of two hazel eyes. Valaire Buchanan's face had grown pallid with fear.

"The thing must have caught up with the boat," she whispered. "My father is in danger. Oh, please! Can't we do something?"

"Steady—steady!" Murray held his voice at normal pitch though his throat felt dry as flannel. "Keep your nerve. Hysteria won't help. Remember we really haven't seen anything yet except tracks, if that's what they really are." He paused, staring off through the jungle. "We'll do all we can to help your father of course. But it's more likely he doesn't need us. Probably we'll discover he has everything under control. The best way is to go and find out." With his last remark, he turned and commenced a savage attack upon the jungle growth with his blade.

After what seemed an eternity in a leafy purgatory where he was doomed forever to swing an intolerable weight,

Jim Murray heard the ripple of running water. And after another eternity, when it seemed that human muscles could endure no more, they reached the Javary River. And a dozen yards upstream lay John Buchanan's motor launch.

A strained, anxious cry burst from Valaire Buchanan.

"It's my father's boat," she said. "Dad! Are you all right?"

Ominously, only the ceaseless drone of the jungle answered her—and abruptly the girl sank in white-faced exhaustion to the bole of a giant fallen tree whose branches thrust into the water. Eyes filling with tears, she looked up at Murray in mute appeal. Words failed him as, sweat-drenched and panting, he turned hastily to survey the launch. What was a guy supposed to say under such circumstances? Unscrewing the cap of Valaire's canteen, he held it to her lips; took a quick, lukewarm drink from his own flask.

"Stay here and rest," he told her. "I'm going to look over the boat and find out what we must do."

By clinging close to the water's edge and utilizing every bit of open space, Murray made his way to the tree to which the boat was moored. About to leap to the deck, he glimpsed a flash of crimson out of the corner of his eye—and he stiffened with horror. Almost at his feet was another of the great tracks. Along one edge of the print a red blotch stained its smoothness—and within that blotch lay a flattened human torso, crushed beyond possible recognition, a rifle like a twisted gas pipe pressed into the flesh. The clothes were those of a native.

He flashed an involuntary glance over his shoulder, then gritted his teeth and looked in the general direction of Val Buchanan. She must not see this or he'd have an hysterical woman on his hands. Not that he would blame her—she was dead game—but he did not feel so healthy himself. Resolutely he turned from the gruesome spectacle and jumped to the deck of the launch.

As he had expected, the boat was deserted. A glance showed why they had tied up there. Engine trouble. Tools

and greasy rags lay scattered about the floor of the engine pit as though Buchanan and his men had been interrupted—as they probably had—by the arrival of the Thing. Apparently, though, they had practically finished, for, beside a loose distributor cap, Murray found everything in order. . . . Before he did anything, he decided, he would pick up Val Buchanan. He would feel safer with her in the boat.

Loosening the painter, Murray let the launch drift downstream to the tree on which the girl waited. After anchoring the boat to an upthrust limb, he helped her to climb on deck.

"There's no one on board," he said carefully. "I'm afraid they've been captured—by Indians, probably, and taken upstream. Engine trouble stopped them, I think, but the engine seems to have been repaired. Possibly we can be on their trail in a very few minutes."

Val Buchanan's expression was one of determination. She had overcome her recent weakness.

"Natives around here would never bother my father," she said. "But let that go. We must get to the mine as quickly as possible."

Murray nodded agreement. Then he jumped into the cockpit and went to work on the engine. He tinkered for a few moments, and suddenly the motor leaped to roaring life. He let it run for a minute, then cut the switch and straightened up.

"We'll look for weapons and then start." He gestured toward several lockers. "You start at one end; I'll take the other."

The first locker contained nothing of interest. The second brought to light a long brown bottle labeled "Jamaica Rum." After momentary hesitation, Murray decided it might be useful later on and thrust it into his hip pocket. With his hand on the door of the next closet, he stiffened and turned toward the somber wall of jungle. Through the normal tropical noises, ripped the tortured crash of rending timber and an ominous rumble of distant thunder—metallic thunder, growing louder every minute.

MECHANICALLY Murray moved to Valaire's side and waited, dreading the sight of whatever might be approaching. Slender fingers seized his arm and clung to it.

The noise mounted rapidly, blotting out the rising bedlam of jungle sounds. The walls of the matted forest shook as though they, too, were afraid. Then directly before them an aisle burst open as great trees crashed and flattened before a thing of nightmare proportions. It rolled up to the river's edge like some fantastic juggernaut, and hung there poised, as though contemplating the boat. Summoned, perhaps, by the sound of the motor.

Murray drew the girl deeper into the dubious shelter of the engine pit, and for moments his astonished eyes saw with photographic clarity every incredible detail of the towering monster.

It was a glistening purple wheel fully two hundred feet in height, a wheel without a rim. It was metal—*purple* metal—and each of its numerous spokes was all of a yard thick, terminating in a six-foot umbrella shaped knob. Strangest of all was the hub of the wheel—a huge metal sphere, from opposite sides of which projected a score of tapering tentacular cables. Some were coiled tightly against the face of the sphere; others touched the ground, or coiled around the trunks of trees as though supporting the metal wheel.

Now several tentacles lashed out; and in a breath the launch was enveloped in a web of purple cables that drew it bodily from the muddy water and whipped it up to the spherical hub of the wheel. During the nauseating gyrations, Murray, in a single mad blur of sound and motion, heard Valaire Buchanan scream—saw her hurtling through the air—saw a streak of purple lash out and catch her, saw it whip her back to the face of the gleaming knob—felt himself crash painfully into a niche behind the engine block. In moments he found himself wedged there with Valaire Buchanan dangling limply ten feet above him.

Murray's ideas were a spinning, chaotic jumble.

"I hope Val hasn't been injured," he thought. "What kind of intelligence could build, control a machine like this? Same intelligence that changed the sky. Really in a spot now, and nothing to do about it. This must have been the thing which hit Buchanan and his men."

Abruptly thought ceased as the great machine started rolling back along the path it had gouged for itself. For one brief moment Murray was aware of a stupefying gyration as sky and jungle merged in a sickening, whirling blur—a roar of deep rolling thunder—then he glimpsed a wrench leaping from nowhere; felt it crash with a flare of blinding light against his skull. Blackness fell with the fading and dying of all sound.

JIM MURRAY came out of the fog of unconsciousness slowly, first aware of a rhythmic, painful throbbing on the top of his head. He opened his eyes to stare blankly at a varnished ceiling above him. Dizzily he sat up, squeezing past something that looked like an engine, and stared around him. Instantly full recollection returned, and with it came uneasiness and a feeling of anxiety for Valaire. Vividly he recalled the purple metal wheel with its knobs and whipping tentacles; and simultaneously he became aware of a delicate violet mist that filled the air about him. Odorless, transparent, undetectable except to sight.

He shrank back against the engine block and remained motionless, listening. Faintly the familiar jungle sounds came to him, faintly, as though far away. With painful caution he raised his head above the edge of the engine pit and looked around.

The launch lay on its side in the midst of the splintered ruins of shacks which had once housed the native crew of the "Diamond Queen." Fifty feet away he could see the edge of the pit that led into the diamond diggings. He could see a steady violet glow pouring from the crater.

Nowhere was there sign of life. And little wonder, for the ground on every hand bore those unmistakable umbrella

shaped prints pressed deep into the earth. . . .

Soundlessly, with caution born of the dread of the unknown, Murray left the shelter of the launch and started across the open. The uncanny quiet seemed to have blotted out every sound except that far-away, muffled hum of the jungle.

STEALTHILY he moved toward the edge of the pit. Every nerve and muscle was strained to hairspring tenseness in his concentration on what might lie within the mine.

As he advanced, he became aware of the strangest sensation—a feeling of reverence, of awe, of worship! With every step the feeling intensified, became more alluring. Striving to fathom this utterly foreign emotion, Murray recalled the brief mention Val had made of something which had seized her in some strange manner as she flew over the mine—like some magnet of the mind. . . .

A yard from the edge of the mine he paused, slid flat on his chest and peered over the rim. He gasped, and for several moments could only stare in blank astonishment.

The diamond workings had grown to many times their normal size, cutting deeply into the jungle on the opposite side. Funnel-shaped now, a tremendous ramp spiralled around its inner wall, running from a point across from him to the wide base of the funnel—a ramp created for the use of the gigantic metal wheel, as the deep-cut tracks revealed.

Far below he saw the unearthly Juggernaut standing motionless beside a tremendous mass of unfamiliar apparatus. Purple machinery, like nothing of earth, dominated by two huge glowing tubes that towered above it—tubes that despite their size, seemed as fragile and delicate as frozen violet mist.

Murray's gaze left the tubes and rested on something even more strange. From the center of the gigantic bowl of purple metal that formed the base of the funnel, rose a globe of pulsing violet radiance. Only a small part of the mass, it seemed to dominate it completely. Murray shook his head; this globe was not part of any-

thing. It was the heart and brain and power of all within the pit. For from it rose that alien light, from it pulsed that overpowering sense of reverence. It seemed alive — was alive — supernally alive, worthy of his worship.

The thought seized him. It pulsed through him in tempo with the throbbing pulsation of the light within the globe. He must go down there, must pay homage to this wondrous entity—must join those others—

Those others? The thought jarred him to his senses. His lips twisted in a soundless curse. He fixed straining eyes on minute figures covering the floor of the metal bowl all around the sphere of light. Men were there, lying prone, with arms outstretched. Val Buchanan was there—Val, her mind and body subject to this insane worship!

More than men crouched before the alien thing. Beasts! A gigantic boa constrictor motionless beside a great black-furred jungle cat. A tapir crowding a howler monkey. Brightly plumaged birds as one with beasts and men, in their worship of this being of light.

Brow furrowed with effort, Murray rose slowly from the lip of the abyss and drew back—twenty feet, thirty, fifty, beyond the range of that dreadful reverence.

Mechanically he clambered up over the sloping bow of the launch and dropped soundlessly to the canted deck. He slid into the engine pit and squatted there, scowling savagely. What should he do—what could he do? So much depended on him. He thought of Val Buchanan as he had seen her dangling unconscious in a coiled metal tentacle of the wheel. He thought of her father, of those others down in the pit—and ominously he pictured the possibilities of other multitudes coming under the baleful influence of that alluring light.

What was the Thing? It must be behind all the strange things which had been happening. This ability to create the urge of worship in man and mindless beast—it was a fearful power. Abruptly he shrugged and stood erect.

Somehow the Thing had to be stopped

—and it looked as though it was up to him.

He turned to the lockers to continue his search for a weapon which had been interrupted so strangely. In moments he found what he sought, a Winchester automatic, loaded, and with it lay a half box of cartridges. He dumped the ammunition into his pocket, picked up the rifle and examined it carefully. Satisfied, he worked his way silently out of the beached launch. As carefully he crossed the open ground to the edge of the mine.

As before, that awesome feeling of reverence assailed him. Furiously he strove to blot it out, centering every thought on the purpose he had fixed in his mind. He would put a slug in that purple globe if it was the last thing he did.

DRIPPING prone on the edge of the pit, he flung the rifle to his shoulder and sighted along the barrel. Amazingly, the sight danced before him, wavering drunkenly. What was wrong with him? Fever? . . . And even as the question formed, he knew. The influence of the Thing down there was becoming too strong. He had to shoot while he could.

Taking uncertain aim, he jerked the trigger. The rifle bucked against his shoulder, and he heard the echoes of the shot reverberating through the pit.

Silence for the instant that followed—then something like sound that was not exactly sound filled all the purple mist. A vibration that pulsed through every nerve and fibre of Jim Murray's being. Thoughts drove into his brain, alien thoughts, filled with reproach, yet tinged, it seemed, with fear. The fear—if it existed at all—was gone instantly, and somehow Murray was thinking how mad he had been to consider destroying that beautiful creation. Why, it was godlike—it was a god—a God of Light!

It meant only good to men, had come to this world to lift men from their low level, to make them like gods—Gods of Light. For ages it had been planned—and he had thought to destroy a work that was older than life on Earth.

Murray's eyes became fixed upon the

purple mist that hovered wraithlike before him; his vision seemed suddenly to gain new power. Thoughts that were alien to him, yet seemed to be formed in his own brain, slowly merged with a strange three-dimensional picture growing in the mist like a mirage.

He saw an alien city of metal and crystal and violet radiance, a city beautiful beyond expression. Its buildings were tremendous spheres of glittering crystal in which moved creatures of light. Not all were violet; every color of the spectrum was there, all vying with each other in their incredible beauty. He saw living spheres of light borne from globe to globe by tentacled metal wheels, saw other fantastic machinery whose purpose was not disclosed.

Then the view changed, and he was looking down upon a great plain surrounded by low, rolling hills. At first glance it resembled another crystal city, this one formed of glistening purple metal, globes half buried beneath the surface of the plain. There were thousands of the spheres, spaced at intervals equal to their own size, and filling all the valley.

Almost immediately thought of a city was dispelled by the appearance of an amazing procession moving over one of the hills—a seemingly endless line of rolling, rimless wheels! Each metal giant bore in its tentacles a glowing sphere of light. Violet, green, rose, yellow, blue—a glorious spectacle.

Each of the wheels bore its cargo to one of the metal spheres; a tentacle touched the side of the globe, and its upper half folded back as though on a hinge. Murray caught a glimpse of strange machinery within the lower hemisphere; then the wheel rolled over the edge, placed its burden of living light in the center of the cup on a raised platform—and the metal sphere closed.

Again the scene changed, and Murray saw a vast horde of purple balls rising from the plain, flashing up, up from their parent world, out into space. Saw them spread over all the heavens, fan out, thinning, vanishing in an infinity of starpricked blackness.

The vision followed one of the globes,

saw it fade out—then fade in again, speeding toward a knot of glowing worlds. To Murray's mind came the knowledge that it was in distress, must land.

It flashed directly toward a little world, the third from the white-hot central star, a steaming world where nothing lived, where seas boiled, and volcanoes belched incessantly through a crust of hot, noxious mud. Earth as it was uncounted milleniums in the past.

The sphere struck with its speed unchecked, struck and vanished, buried in the prehistoric world.

Again the vision changed. He saw the interior of the space-ship. There was the globe of light, unharmed. At one side pulsed a growing light, a formless something that gradually became a mass of crystalline tubes. As he watched their light dimmed. They glowed faintly, but with steady power, as they would continue to glow for ages to come, fed by energy almost inexhaustible.

NOW the living Light in the globe faded, its throbbing slowed, became quiescent, almost disappeared. A veil of utter blackness like something physical drew about the sphere, cloaking it—and the God of Light slept.

The vision vanished. Jim Murray was again staring into a gossamer veil of violet light.

In his mind thoughts still formed, thoughts of a God of Light that slept while Earth passed through its infancy, its lusty youth, drawing toward maturity. A Light that slept till something—perhaps the pickaxe of a native worker in the Diamond Queen—had disturbed its slumbers.

“I awakened,” a soundless voice seemed to whisper in Murray's brain, “and when I saw these strange beings like you, I knew that the time had come when my mission should be fulfilled. A time when the life of this world needed the transformation that my race can give, when men should become beings of Light. I have studied your kind, and have learned—much.

“I strove to communicate with my own

world, but something in your atmosphere checked the radiations, casting them back.* I had to change your sky to permit the message to pass through. And soon, soon others of my race will come, and the transformation will begin."

The soundless words ended, and Murray became aware of a command, firm, irresistible. He must go down there into the pit and worship! He arose to the command and began to run with a shambling gait around the rim of the pit toward the end of the spiral ramp. His body moved without volition of his, and so moved his mind. Alien thoughts—how repulsive were all things human—how glorious the God of Light. Thoughts of that incredibly beautiful world he had seen—joy at the knowledge that Earth would be like it, a world where monstrosities called men, purely physical and grossly misshapen, could not exist. Visions of the bliss that would be his when he, too, would become a creature of Light. But he must hurry—hurry!

And nothing—nothing must stop him!

The rough terrain, pitted and furrowed by overlapping prints of the great wheel, was a treacherous thing, and treacherously it caught Jim Murray's feet. He pitched headlong. The fall slammed the breath from his lungs, and it wrenched him free of the hypnosis that had clutched his reason. Beautiful things he had seen—like the drug-born visions of a hop-head—but he did not like 'em!

GROGGILY he scrambled to his feet, his gaze sweeping the ground for the Winchester he had dropped in his fall. That first shot had missed, but he'd make

* Radio waves are transmitted from sending to receiving stations by reflection from the ionosphere. The ionosphere consists of layers of ionized or electricity-conducting air from 60 to 300 miles above the earth. These layers act as reflectors for radio waves and make transmission possible.

Depending upon the degree of ionization of a layer, there is an upper limit to the frequency which may be reflected. Waves of higher frequencies than this upper limit pass through the ionosphere out into space. The air in these layers is ionized principally by ultra-violet light from the sun. Increase in sunspot activity, accompanied by eruptions in the sun, has often caused the complete fadeout of high frequency transmission.

It seems evident that the God of Light was sending out its message on a prearranged frequency too low to penetrate the ionosphere. Consequently the ionosphere had to be changed, somehow, to permit the passing of the message into space. The secondary result of this change was the violet tinge of the sky.

the second one count. That thing could not take his mind from him again. He scooped up the rifle—and with the force of a blow that accursed vibration seized him—seized him and filled him with loathing for the touch of metal. The feel of the cool, smooth surface made his flesh crawl. He would drop the thing and run—run down into that pit where he could worship the wondrous Light. Run—he must run. . . .

With a tremendous effort of will Murray kept the rifle tightly clutched in his hand and refused to move a single step toward the ramp. His thoughts were wildly, desperately, seeking a way out. He could not fight this thing for long. Shakily he forced himself to sit down on the ground—and sat on the rum bottle he had thrust into his hip pocket back on the launch.

The rum! He would pour it down, every drop. He would be hanged if he would be able to walk, much less run, to that triple-cursed ramp.

Dropping the Winchester, he whipped out the bottle, drew the cork—and an inner voice urgently told him the liquid was a horrible concoction, poisonous, loathsome, something to be cast aside. Nauseated, Murray hesitated. Then hesitation vanished as the unmistakable aroma drifted to his nostrils. He would drink.

He tilted the bottle against his lips and poured the rum down. He drank till he thought the lining was gone from his throat, drank till not a drop remained and hell-fire raged in his stomach. Gagging and coughing, he squatted there, tears flooding his eyes. He drew in great lungfuls of air and slowly rose to his feet. He was not feeling the effects yet, but he would, shortly. Yes, indeed, he would be feeling it.

HE PICKED up the rifle and strode toward the edge of the pit. He felt the soundless voice urging him to move—toward the ramp. It was quite clear. He must come down into the pit, down there to that purple globe. He must hurry.

"Hurry!" he growled belligerently.

"What the blazes is the hurry? I'm coming."

At the sound of his voice the urging of the Light died as though it realized the hopelessness of coping with his liquor-drugged brain.

He swaggered along the edge of the pit and finally paused on the lip of the ramp looking down upon the purple globe and the wheel, and the huge glowing tubes. It was lovely, he thought. Quite lovely. He thought of the marvelous vision he had seen, on the incalculable age of the Light, and he shook his head sadly. It was too bad he was going to smash it. He was going to smash it, all right. He had to, so Valaire and those others down there could get up off their faces. He felt quite godlike about it, swaying there on the edge of the abyss, with everything so small and trivial and far beneath him. And why shouldn't he feel godlike? The Light had offered to make him a God. He shook his head solemnly. Couldn't kid him; there was a catch somewhere.

He wondered if they could hear him, those little people.

"Hey!" he yelled, waving the empty bottle above his head. "Hey!"

They did not move; and momentarily he lost interest in them as the bottle slipped from his hand and went spinning out over the pit. He watched it turn end over end, hurtling down, down, dwindling, finally lost to his eye.

Teetering perilously on the brink, he lurched back, tripped over his own feet, and sat down. He grinned a trifle groggily to himself.

"Here we go again, boys," he announced solemnly.

He was aroused from the armor-like numbness that was creeping over him by sudden activity in the pit. He blinked owlshly to clear the mist from his eyes. The beautiful tubes glowed and dimmed, glowed and dimmed; and to the rise and fall of the violet light the huge wheel started rolling ponderously up the ramp. The familiar metallic thunder ripped through the air. He watched it, nodding wisely to himself. Since he had sidestepped the hypnotic efforts of the globe,

it was trying a more direct attack.

With curious and faintly sobered detachment, Murray sprawled at the edge of the ramp and pointed the Winchester at the tubes. Their flickering light reminded him now of a shooting gallery at Coney Island. Three shots for a nickel. When you made a bull's eye, a bell rang.

Carefully he sighted at the first tube. The glow brightened, and he squeezed the trigger. For a second nothing happened, and he cursed. Then suddenly that particular section of the apparatus vanished for an instant in a searing flash of light that plumed up from the shattered tube to the rim of the pit in an agony of combustion.

Murray rubbed his burning eyes and blinked away the tears that momentarily blinded him. With the explosion, the wheel had faltered on the ramp, but now with the steady rise and fall of light in the other tube, it lurched on, thundering a voiceless threat. As the flashes increased in tempo, it gained speed, its tentacles lashing angrily about it.

"Don' fire till you see the whites o' their eyes," muttered Murray thickly.

He cuddled the stock of the Winchester closer to him and drew a bead on the second great tube, bulking weirdly through the smoke rising from the charred and twisted fragments of its companion.

Again he squeezed the trigger. Again the flaring, anguished leap of purple fire, and then—nothing. Nothing but the violet glow of the God of Light shining through gray smoke-wraiths rolling up from shattered, fusing machinery.

Glumly Murray shook his head. Bull's eyes, both of 'em—an' no bells. . . .

On the ramp below him the huge wheel rolled drunkenly forward under its own momentum, tilting now to one side, now to the other. Murray watched with one squinting eye as it teetered on the edge. He saw the wildly alarmed pulsations of the globe. Slowly the wheel started retracing its path. It gathered speed as it rolled down the ramp; down, down, its tentacles whipping and trailing helplessly behind it. It struck the wall, rebounded, then leaped out—far out.

IT STRUCK the floor of the pit with earth-shaking force, bounded into the air over the prone worshipers—and landed in the midst of the machinery surrounding the stumps of tubes.

Skidded—spun wildly into the globe of living purple!

One high, ringing note sounded in the bottom of the pit, swelling, rolling out, deep, bell-toned, as though all the chimes on Earth had been struck one mighty blow. The God of Light—died.

Up on the ramp Jim Murray slid gently into the stupor that at last was claiming its own. He smiled happily.

“Bull’s eye,” he murmured. “Bells!”
“Feeling better?”

A crisp, cheerful voice penetrated Jim Murray’s mind as he opened his eyes. He drew himself up on one elbow and peered around with bleary uncertainty. Feeling better? His head was thumping like a native drum and his tongue felt like a slab of freshly smoked Brazilian rubber. Had he ever felt worse? Some hangover! He tried to recall the party. . . .

Memory returned in a flood and Murray blinked anxiously toward the sky. It was blue, a vivid, tropical blue. Relieved, he took stock of his surroundings. He was lying on a blanket on the deck of Buchanan’s motor launch, again floating in the muddy waters of the Javary River. Standing over him solicitously were the mine owner and his daughter, Valaire. There was a smile on the girl’s face that did Murray a lot of good.

“Feel like a million,” he grimaced, struggling to his feet. His eyes met those of Val Buchanan. “Well, we made it!”

The girl’s expression sobered.

“You made it,” she said.

“And we owe you a lot,” her father added earnestly, struggling with thoughts that could not find expression.

“Nothing to it,” Murray said uncomfortably, looking toward the mine.

Native workers were busy among the

ruins of what had been their shacks. From the amount of work they had done, he must have been out for twenty-four or forty-eight hours. There was no sign of the violet glow that had risen from the pit. Turning to Buchanan, he spoke in a voice he tried to make casual.

“Are—things dead down there?” he asked.

“Everything. Nothing there but a few dead animals. When that wheel crashed into the mine and smashed things, the pit turned into a miniature hell. There were men there, and birds and beasts and crawling things that the wheel had captured. The Light had held them powerless—but when the smash came—well, for a while it was pretty bad. Fortunately I was armed, and the animals were thoroughly scared, so we came through it in one piece. . . . Nothing down there now but bodies and some very strange metal that may be worth more than diamonds.” Buchanan looked keenly into Murray’s eyes. “Did the Light—do you understand all that was involved in that globe’s being here?”

“Yes,” said Murray, “and I’m hoping that a certain message, if it gets to where it’s going, won’t find any intelligent life to receive it.”

“We can only wait and see.” Buchanan’s manner changed abruptly, a twinkle appearing in his eyes. “Valaire tells me you were waiting in Remate de Males to see me about a job.”

“That’s correct. I’m an engineer—worked everything from Alaska to the Transvaal. I’d like a chance at Brazilian diamonds—if you really need someone. . . .”

“Oh, but we do,” Val interposed warmly. Then she blushed with rosy confusion at her father’s dry chuckle.

Jim Murray met Val Buchanan’s gaze with warm intensity.

“If that’s the case,” he said quietly, “I’ll give it a trial.”

COMING NEXT ISSUE

BEYOND THE VORTEX

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

took part. Am I right? If this is a new series it certainly should be kept up, as it is O.K.

The "Tubby" story by Ray Cummings is passable, but only that. If I hadn't read some of his classics, it would be hard to believe that he can write good material. The other story in this issue "Juke Box Asteroid" was the worst story, though even this wasn't too bad.—2061 Watson Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

You leave the old Sarge little to say in reply to you, Kiwi Michel. In answer to your query about the Wellman characters, yes, they have appeared before and have now returned. I rather think you will see quite a bit more of them in issues to come.

HARD TO PICK

By Norman Wegemer

Having obtained a Spring issue of TWS, and having read it, I will now tell you what I think of it.

It was hard to pick a story for first place this time, but I finally have chosen "Star of Treasure" though "The Veil of Astellar" runs it a very close second.

Next is "Gamblers Asteroid" and then "Unsung Hero" which is good for an amateur.

We could have done without "Juke Box Asteroid," "Battle of the Solar System" and "Gas Attack," but you do need something to fill your space, don't you?

The cover was good, but not because it was unusual, unless you say it was unusual because it was good.

I don't know much about art so I will not comment on the interior art work.

This issue, like the Winter one, was better than usual. Keep it up, will you?

The departments were good. Your department is still the best by far.

I agree completely with what Guy Trucano, Jr., said in his letter in the last issue.

Enclosed is my application for the Science Fiction League and is there any chapter near here?—332 Benedict St., St. Mary's, Pa.

Smooth rocketing, Pee-lot Wegemer. I hope Pennsylvania SFLeaguers note your last question. Thanks for the left-handed compliment on the department. I never really know whether you kiwis are soft-soaping the old Sarge or preening yourselves on your own letters. But who cares? Blast on.

SOLID FUEL

By Dan Wilbite

Tell that guy Trucano that it is differences of opinion that make politics, competition in business, horse races and dice games.

Brother George Lewis sorta throwed a twelve on that last try. Shoot again bud, you're faded. That rocket motor idea reminds me of my perpetual motion machine; it looked good in theory, but the darned thing won't work. Wrap it up in a space ship and see how much room you have left for anything else.

One thing that puzzles me is the way that newspapers, magazines, and now even you, Sarge, are gradually building up in the public mind the fact that it is a war-forced development of solid-fuel-burning internal combustion engine. Such is not the case. I refer you to any textbook on internal combustion engines published between 1906 and 1910. You will find about as much space devoted to solid as to liquid fuels. About that time the Fairbanks-Morse Co. was marketing an industrial engine that could compete with Niagara Falls in per KWH cost of electric energy, which was better than any steam plant could do at that time. If any of you doubting Thomases are from Missouri just ankle down to the Public Library and soak up a few facts and figures.

The bug in the ointment was that the gasoline engine could be made smaller and still operate efficiently and the steam engine and boiler boys developed the steam turbine, so no one gave the solid fuel engine any more thought until some of the European boys ran short of ramble-sap.

South America and Africa are both standing in a corner feeling sorry for themselves because they don't have any petroleum to motor them around,

and between them they control the part of the world that can produce more solid carbon compounds per sq. ft. than another and not deplete their resources. Could I interest you in a quarter section on the Amazon or Congo valleys?—3212 Maryland Ave., Little Rock, Ark.

Kiwi Wilbite, you have dug up a swell bone for a gnawing argument. The rest of you pee-lots sink your teeth into it and worry it around some. I believe I remember a recent item on solid fuel that appeared in SCIENTIFACTS, a department conducted by one of my colleagues with fantods in the head. Perhaps we are going to get down to real solid fuel when we reach for atomic power in uranium-235 or some other heavy metal source.

TWS TOPS!

By Rose Marie Riewald

Your stories were exceptionally good this issue.

1. "The Veil of Astellar" takes first place. The best story of its kind I've ever read.

2. "Battle of the Solar System." Hurray for Cummings.

3. "Juke Box Asteroid."

4. "Star of Treasure." Compared with "The Veil of Astellar," it wasn't so good.

5. "Gambler's Asteroid." Phooey.

Virgil Finlay takes top honors in the art department. Paul comes next.

Your front covers are absolutely hopeless. How are people supposed to know what good reading hides behind those loud covers?

But as far as the rest of your mag is concerned, it's tops with me.

Please let me know where my nearest Science Fiction Chapter is.—345 W. 4 Street, New York, N. Y.

You don't really think the covers are completely hopeless, do you, Kiwi Riewald? We get a lot of compliments—as well as digs—about the covers. In fact, there's more scarping over cover around here than there is in Berlin during an RAF Mosquito bombing raid. But never mind. You write in to the old Sarge and fuss about anything you like.

Now comes a junior astrogator who likes the cover but gets indigestion from some of the contents.

AT LAST THE SFL

By Robert X. Schick

Dear Sarge: For six years I've been reading T.W.S., and for six years I've been filling out the Sfl. league coupon. I have finally gotten around to putting it in an envelope with an unused stamp.

Now for the Spring issue:

The cover was excellent. Could have been better if Bergey had spent a little more time on the female. Why don't you have a cover done by your new artist who did the work for "The Star of Treasure?" That pic on page 13 was really a lulu. Marchioni was poor, as usual, while Morey was down to his usual standards.

"STAR OF TREASURE" seemed to be a carbon copy of "The Quest Beyond the Stars." The story was mediocre, but topped all.

"VEIL OF ASTELLAR," and "UNsung HERO" are tied for second place. Leigh did a nice job of a good plot, but the story didn't seem to click with me. Maybe it was that corny ending. "Unsung Hero" was refreshing, and by far the best short story. That Washburn dame can write, can't she?

"BATTLE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM" was the best Tubby yarn yet, but I usually don't care for them.

The paper for which "JUKE BOX ASTEROID," "GAMBLER'S ASTEROID," and "GAS ATTACK," were printed upon, could have been used for better purposes.

Here are some suggestions: Have that Coblentz novel soon. Keep F. B. Long out of T.W.S., and start printing your rating department again! If you don't, I will. So here are my tabulations on

the Winter issue (based upon *The Reader Speaks*).

- first place votes—
1. A God Named Kroo.....58 pts. (8) Incl. mine
 2. Trophy43 pts. (2)
 4. The Invisible Army.....32 pts.
 5. Swing your Lady.....25 pts.
 6. Moon Trap13 pts.
 7. Venusian Nightmare—...4 pts.

In my opinion the Winter issue was the best since June, 1939.

I expected a 15th anniversary issue, with the pictures of all the new authors and artists.—927 Faile street, the Bronx 59, N. Y.

The answer, Kiwi Schick, is paper rationing. You just wait, and we'll give you an anniversary number that will make a BEM out of you. And, tell me, are those pts. of your rating system points—or pints? Anyway, you can see for yourself how your rating stacks up with that of other pee-lots as we shake out the communiques.

TOO SHORT

By Emile E. Greenleaf, Jr.

Last Sunday I went to mail a letter to a friend, a science fiction fan, too, and after mailing it, crossed the street to the drugstore. As usual, after buying what I went to get, I dived at the magazine stand. There I saw the most beautiful thing imaginable. T.W.S.

The readers' department of the Spring T.W.S. seemed a little too short. Waible's e-double oh ditto, but who isn't? If Iva Golden wants to know what Xeno is, I'll tell her. It's Kickapoo Joy-Juice on a scientific basis. Right, Sarge?

"Star of Treasure" gets first place. "Veil of Astellar," second.

(3) "Juke Box Asteroid"

(4) "Unsung Hero"

(5) "Gambler's Asteroid"

(6) "Gas Attack" Amusingly clever.

(7) "Battle of the Solar System." No! No! What have the fans done to deserve this? It reminds me of a story from a juvenile's book that could be titled "Science Fiction a la Grimm's Fairy Tales."

I'm looking forward to next issue.—1303 Myrtle St., New Orleans 19, La.

Let's not get into an analysis of Xeno, Pee-lot Greenleaf. Such equations get a fellow orry-eyed and leave him with a bad headache. The old Sarge thought the Spring number of TWS looked pretty good himself. Sort of an Easter outfit, no?

We next bring to bat that budding artist who lays a profane hand on the likeness of his senior astrogator.

I LIKE THE NEW FORMAT

By Joe Kennedy

Sarge, Old Bean: I like your new format. Nice, neat, easily readable. Anything to save paper. Sure too bad *The Reader Speaks* had to be shortened this trip. I didn't mind being left out. Give somebody else a chance. (Hope I'm not encouraging you to quit printing my missives . . .) Next time you'll be able to print the entire mag in the new-size type. Yep. And the letter department can be long. Like usual. Obey. Goody. Hooray.

For quite a while now, Leigh Brackett has been a special favorite of mine. Brackett's characters are REAL. Brackett's writing is CLEVER. Brackett can write circles around half the S-F authors in the field today. And now she did it. A minor classic! I won't waste my ink raving over the merits of "Veil of Astellar," since that should be apparent to everybody who reads it. TWS has been in a slump of late. Really good stories have become increasingly few. At last! There is a cure! Lots more of Leigh's swell work! She's T.O.P.S. Do I make myself clear?

Idle thaws: Crummings—er—Cummings—is back with us again, after a long absence. So he's hack. True. So he's corn. True again. Well, even when he's corny hack, he's readable. More than can be said for some typer-pounders. . . . When do we get a cover that we won't be afraid to show to our friends? A rocket ship or futuristic would be just as attractive. The fellow who wrote the blurb for "Juke-Box Asteroid" should study up on

(Turn page)

Learn something
about your War Bonds
from this fellow!



THE BEST THING a bulldog does is HANG ON! Once he gets hold of something, it's mighty hard to make him let go!

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WAR BONDS
to Have and to Hold

*The Treasury Department
acknowledges with appreciation the
publication of this message by*

THE PUBLISHERS OF THIS MAGAZINE

his live-talk. Who's this fellow who mimics Finlay with such interesting results?

Tsk-tsk. Sarge Saturn doesn't like comment on past issues. Don't blame him. I have a theory. Main item of said theory is: *nobody gives a damn about what I think of the stories and artwork. Ain't dat amazing?* Revolutionary! Indubitably. Sarge wants good material in his dept. Yowsah. Of course. I agree. Undoubtedly. Will gladly comply. That's me. Always glad to aid such a worthy cause. Of course. Pun. Get it? Me neither. But about this good material business. I have done it. Yeah. You bet. Certainly. Without doubt. WHAT' have I done? I shall tell. Come closer, while I unfold the gruesome details. That's right. Now. *I have written another poem!* Don't scream like that! Not so loud! D'ya want the cops to hear? Thusly . . . my masterpiece:

*I never saw a purple BEM;
I never hope to see one,
But I can tell you anyhow,
From the TWS covers, I can tell that there must
certainly be one.*

Amid thunderous bursts of well-deserved applause, I retire to my little room with the rubber walls, where I can bounce around to my heart's content, untroubled by such nightmares as writing letters to readers' columns.—*8 1/2 Baker Ave., Dover, N. J.*

Where do you space yardbirds get the idea that the old Sarge objects to comments on previous issues? All I said was why not write about something else also—and then the fight began. I won't take the time to spot-weld your ears together at this point, Kiwi Joe, but since you like Leigh Brackett's work, here's a tip. Watch for her complete novel, **SHADOW OVER MARS**, in **STARTLING STORIES**. It'll be along soon.

CALLING ALL ARTISTS!

By Austin Hamel

Dear Sarge: Congratulations on your new artist Donnelly. He is reminiscent of Finlay, but he is not his equal by a long shot. He is better than your average artist though. Why not let him try a cover?

I hate to say it but Cummings had better quit "Tubby," and nose down into something worthwhile. I have always liked Cumming's stuff, but recently he has not been too good. Something like his "Wings of Icarus" in a late *Startling Stories* would be appreciated now.

Harbaugh's story brought forth an aged plot, but the manner in which he handled it was superb. More, more, more! At last a story where Martians are not sly, scheming demons! "Astellar" was a great story, but tended to be a little over-dramatic at times. More from Brackett, though.

Smith, made up ten-fold for the nightmare in the Winter issue. I was well prepared for a surprise ending, but didn't suspect anything like that!

When I first read "That's Just Like a Martian," I knew that it would have a better sequel, and "Gambler's Asteroid" was better.

The new print isn't bad, and it saves a lot of space, although I notice all the stories did not have this type of print.

Please tell me why you do not use Alex Schomberg. He is a really good artist, and you haven't used him in any of the thrillings since "World Beyond the Sky" in *Startling*.

Bergey's cover was one of the worst he ever did. *The colors!!* The back cover should have been there. It was definitely better.

In parting, please let me ask once more for Schomberg—*2090 East Tremant Ave., Bronx 62, N. Y.*

Kiwi Hamel, we still use Alex Schomberg, but he is doing other illustrative work just now. One of these days you see him back in scientific stuff. As for your comments on Donnelly, I'll let you in on a secret. A. J. Donnelly isn't a he. She is a gal illustrator, and I'm delighted that you like her work.

Rev up the ventilator system a bit, Wartears. We have a communique from what purports to be the Sage of Science-fiction.

REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

By Benson Perry

Dear Sarge: Having come to the conclusion that the reason my letters never see print is that they are illegibly written I have decided to typeout a little gem. Thusly if you can't read this any better you can blame it on me and the balky typewriter.

Now to begin with the cover: OUCH!!! Bergey and Belarski are good artists, but look what they have to paint. You may think that it attracts people, but they never buy the mag again because the cover is not congruent with the inside material. On the other hand, if you have good covers your reputation will go from third up. If you want something attractive, print a meteor collision or a good pic of Saturn or Mars. Tipping the scales at 8.5 is "Unsung Hero." In unison (?) are thousands of voices saying "MORE." Nice pics, too, even if created by Marchioni.

"Juke-box Asteroid" receives 8. Well done considering it's a short.

"Star of Treasure" and "Gambler's Asteroid" tie for 7. Now tell us how they traveled so fast. Maybe Harbaugh doesn't believe in the works of Einstein; personally I have difficulty in traveling faster than light. Glad to see Wellman is continuing his series.

Fanfare, roll of drums, etc. By means of aiding hands from people who should know better Ray Cummings staggers in with 6.7. Dreams can explain anything.

If somebody slips concentrated Xeno in his drink it's his fault.

"Gas Attack." Bet everybody asks you what it's doing in a SF mag. 1.5, and it doesn't deserve it. I started reading "The Veil of Astellar" but gave it up. I gave it a 1. I resumed reading once again and gave it .5. Obviously this leads to a reductio ad absurdum if I finish it. With misgivings our eyes fall on a very short "The Reader Speaks." First comes Paul Carter stumbling in the dust waving a banner (Remember TWS '44, Winter). Infinite cheers for you!! I see Lewis has a novel method of blowing up a rocket ship trying to decelerate without bow rockets.

With painful perseverance our hero (me) has used a typewriter. So if there is little wit in this abomination it's because I was spending my time trying to find where to lay my index fingers. So with a shout of "happy Xeno guzzling" and a solemn warning not to lay the defamilite with the sonic-electron gauge I leave peacefully as—"The Sage of Science-Fiction"—*68 Madbury Rd., Durham, N. H.*

You don't follow our covers consistently from issue to issue, do you, Kiwi Perry? While human figures predominate—because they are of greater universal appeal—we vary them with BEMs and space ships and planetary pictures. Better sprinkle a little sweet marjoram and rosemary with your sage. Do that some thyme, won't you? So you didn't understand **THE VEIL OF ASTELLAR**, eh? Well, I can see that our new policy on stories is not going to work out for you, but do your best with them, won't you? Yeah, nutmegs to you, too.

Speaking of our new policy, here come a pair of communiqes on the subject. Let's fire 'em both right here as a double burst.

PRO

By Bill Hesson

Dear Sarge: I am sending this letter to compliment you on what is apparently a new trend. Namely, the use of fantasy in TWS. Awhile back, you published a story called "The Devil's Fiddle" which was an excellent fantasy. In the last issue of TWS you once more came forth with a very good fantasy named "The Veil of Astellar," by Leigh Brackett, which was in my opinion the best story in the spring ish. It had a perfect combination of all the ingredients necessary for a good fantasy, and while not a masterpiece, it made a very enjoyable yarn.

I have noticed that in recent issues the readers have been using much ingenuity in devising new methods of rating stories. I have thereby adopted a new policy myself. Instead of bestowing some honor upon the story, I intend to present the author with a military rank, according to his or her ability. The ratings follow.

Make Leigh Brackett a MAJOR GENERAL for "The Veil of Astellar."

For "Star of Treasure" elevate C. W. Harbaugh to the position of a LIEUTENANT COLONEL.

M. Wellman deserves the rank of a TOP SERGEANT for "Gambler's Asteroid."

Ford Smith, Joseph Farrell, and Ruth Washburn get the glory of being PRIVATES, FIRST CLASS for their short stories.

Alack and alas, I must crown Ray Cummings, once my favorite author, with the doubtful distinction of being a YARD-BIRD.

The art work this ish was decidedly poor. The only pix worth looking at twice were the ones on pages 13, 73, and 87. But this is what gets me. I counted 12 BEMs on the cover. You must compliment Bergey for me. His BEMs get uglier with each ish.

Honest, Sarge, you really ought to get a good cover artist.

The best letter in the mag was the one by James Russell Gray. Extremely interestin'. Got a letter from a gal. eh? SF could do with a few more Fem Fans.—371 East Claremont St., Pasadena 6, Calif.

CON

By Bill Walbesser, Jr.

Dear Sarge: I finally got the nerve to write to you. The main reason for this letter is to tell you that I don't like your new policy any too much. The way I figure it is that in a science-fiction mag. there should be a little science-fiction. Not all fantasy as it surely will be if you continue on the way you are going. I have nothing against fantasy in its place, but T.W.S. isn't its place. 'Nuff said on that, now to get on to the issue on hand.

First the cover. When I handed the man fifteen cents for the mag. I couldn't figure out why he gave me the mag. and two bits change. After seeing the cover I can.

Confidentially: it's terrible.

Now for the stories. First place goes to Robert Arthur's "Space Command." It was the sort of thing that belongs in a SF magazine. Second is "A God Named Kroo" by Henry Kuttner. Fantasy I'll admit, but good.

Third . . . "The Invisible Army" by Ross Rocklynne. Another fantasy and the theme is pretty old.

Next in order comes "Moon Trap," "Trophy," "Swing Your Lady," and last and certainly least "Venusian Nightmare." I used to make up things like that when I was three.

Now for the illustrations. All of Finlay's were perfect. I don't think you'll ever get a better one
(Turn page)

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than the one on page 99. The rest were all right. Not good but not too bad.

Only one more thing. If you really look like your picture on page 116, Sarge, you're cute. Yes, actually cute. Who would have thought it. And a plea to readers. Will anyone having back issue magazines and books for sale please get in touch with me?—; Grider St., Buffalo, N. Y.

So here we are, just as the old Sarge always winds up on the first of the month—with a pair of Bills, one for and one against. Usually my bills are all against me. Anyway, while you junior pee-lots are milling around over these two propositions or platforms, the old Sarge will mull over the following bolt of lightning.

BOTH BARRELS

By Jhettong ko Tal

Dear Sarge: You asked for it! Without further preamble here's both barrels:

Mendel in his observations erected the basis of modern theories of heredity. They have been evolved in a defeatist pattern (. . . i.e. . . what you are and can be depends upon the chance combination of the genes in the chromosomes) BECAUSE it offers such a nice viewpoint for Homo Sapiens TO SIT DOWN UPON and rest on a comfortable concept of personal limitations.

In other generations men had anthropological deity to fall back on and comfortably accepted limitation as "divine will" and therein found specious justification to avoid effort. It is even written into law wherein the unforeseen is defined as "an act of God" (an odd performance in which Homo Sapiens first conceives of an omnipotent person then proceeds to pass judgment on him in a human court of law!).

However, I have no intent to discuss theology. I merely wish to point out that scientific theory has been developed on the same defeatist pattern. Men shift from one superstition to another. They talk solemnly of "mutations" and "intelligence quotients" and expect the Mathematics of Probability to produce by propitious accident superior human mutations . . . a "Homo Superior" to lead, guide an rule them! Ambivalent psychosis!

Homo Sapiens does not need greater intellectual capacity. He merely needs the GRIT to USE what he has!

Endocrine function and basic personal metabolism is viewed from the same standpoint—HEREDITY. Apparently one should START all one's hopes and plans by carefully selecting one's grandparents! It places us in the same position as the Molasses Candy Men in Alice in Wonderland . . . they could only run when warm . . . and could think of no way to get warm but by running! (I have long suspected laws were made by lawyers . . . for the benefit of lawyers. I wonder if schools are run by teachers for the benefit of teachers! In short, have we a system of education or a system of academic indocrination? Are the young squirts taught to think . . . or merely WHAT to think?)

Heredity may indeed give you what you start with, but I deny it predetermines WHAT YOU DO WITH IT!

Take that matter of endocrine function. Consider: John Doe comes home and finds his wife in the arms of another man. His adrenal glands fighting mad and boiling with energy. SO? Well . . . what I want to know is HOW his adrenal shoot adrenaline into his blood stream and he is glands KNEW that man wasn't her brother? See what I'm driving at?

Then if a THOUGHT PATTERN can cause a reaction in the adrenal glands . . . why not the thyroids, parathyroids, pituitary, etc? And, IF we even give tentative consideration to so radical a view, how can basic personal metabolism remain a fixed factor? AND . . . if we CAN alter it . . . the heredity concept is no longer a device on which to deposit ambition and let it rot!

Leigh Brackett pines wistfully for jewel-studded "Astellar" . . . and Harbaugh also makes a gesture of longing toward the "Ultimate Secret" . . .

How do you know, Leigh, that the answer isn't simple and within your own skull? I'm not talking "Christian Science," mysticism nor metaphysics but psychology, biology, chemistry and physical experiment.

Our doughty "Sergeant Saturn" decried the endless discussion of stories and their relative merits in "The Reader Speaks." He even rashly threatened to print scientific hypothesis if anyone wrote such a letter. That plaint together with the obvious thought patterns in the minds of Brackett and Har-

baugh as they built their stories in this Spring issue of TWS tempted me to write as I have written here. I'm curious what the reaction may be.

I send kindest regards to Sergeant Saturn and my fellow addicts to fantasy.—P. O. Box 188, Stoughton, Mass.

Now if you space monkeys don't think this is a different sort of letter than the common or garden variety of good-cover, bad-cover, good-story, bad-story you are in the wrong kindergarten. Kiwi ko Tal, whether you are pulling my leg or not, you've got me scratching my head where it doesn't itch. I'm a bit out of my atmosphere, but danged if your words don't string together to make interesting palaver. As I get it, you have presented in scientifiction nomenclature the old college debate theme, "Which has the greater influence, environment or heredity?" And you seem to lean toward the personal application of elbow grease on the part of the subject (mental, as well as physical) to lift himself out of his rut and make himself truly the captain of his soul and the arbiter of his destiny.

All that I am, all that I hope to be, I owe to my ductless glands—plus a little personal attention to the machinery. And, d'you know, Kiwi ko Tal, it pleases the old Sarge that you do not subscribe to the practice of blaming everything on Providence. But then you aren't a Rhode Island man, anyway.

I like your letter. I'd like it even if I didn't agree with anything you said. You have broached a subject worthy of a lot of discussion, and if we get any repercussions, I'll broach a full keg of Xeno and wade in next issue with a few choice philosophic observations of my own.

Next speaker!

PLEASANTLY SURPRISED!

By Henry Elsner, Jr.

Dear Sarge: I was pleasantly surprised with the Spring T.W.S.! The cover was just fair, but it was much better than the last one.

Your new typography is okay. I know it's hard for you, with the paper rationing and all. The important thing is that you keep publishing T.W.S. At this time, the Stf. mags need all the support the fans can give them.

I didn't expect much after the tripe that you printed last issue, but the stories were really quite good. Here's how I rate them.

"Veil of Astellar." A different idea, worked out entertainingly. More from Brackett—8.9.

The pic for this was better than Marchoni's usual work. Speaking of art, the usual pics in T.W.S. are *not* good. The artists really can draw, but the scenes you give them to depict put all their efforts to nothing.

"Star of Treasure." Some more of the over-worked hero-heroine-villain stuff. Don't we read enough about dictators, secret police etc. without putting it in Stf.? 7.0. Who did the pics for this?

The shorts were good filler, nothing more. Don't you think the reader's column was rather narrow-minded? Most of the letters just about fall all over you with their high-sounding praise.

As for Kiwi Ebey—all hobbies have slang words, I will continue to call a mag a mag and a pic a pic!

Could you tell me if there is an SFL Chapter in Detroit? Also I would like to hear from all Stf. fans in or around Detroit.—13618 Cedar Grove Ave., Detroit 5, Mich.

Kiwi Dunkelberger, here is a prospect for that new SFL chapter of yours. So you were pleasantly surprised, Pee-lot Elsner? And I'll have you know that wasn't tripe; it was broiled kidney and bacon. For your information, we are not buying any more dictator or World War stories for the duration. Wilbur Thomas illustrated STAR OF TREASURE. Pretty good, wot?

Apropos of covers, here is a rather complete vivisection of the Winter cover.

TO COVER OR NOT TO COVER

By I. L. Davis

Dear Sargeant Saturn: I don't want to be a spoilsport, and maybe science-fiction is no place for strict logic anyway, but one thing about the artwork certainly bothers me. No, not the green monsters—they're standard equipment, and I'd certainly miss them if they went the way of the mammoth. No, my problem is this—why do men and women dress so differently for travelling around in other planets and dimensions? This applies to both the quantity and quality of their garments.

Take the cover of the Winter, 1944, issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES, for example. There are the three men dressed in good sober leather and plastex up to their necks and down to their wrists. And there is Miss Montez, dressed for half-way through a strip tease in a couple of wisps of filmy white. (That bolero jacket she lost in the lift wouldn't be much of an addition; go look at a bolero jacket.)

Although Miss Montez gets told pretty sharply by Carter that "people who don't know conditions on strange planets should not meddle with matters," it looks to me as if she knew more about the Venusian climate than the two gentlemen reporters and the Interplanetary Police Officer. They are rigged out for pretty cool weather, if you ask me. She at least seems to have thought that it *might* be hot on Venus. Of course, her costume is just a trifle frilly and unbusinesslike to cover a mining strike in, but at least she was cooler than the three gents in theirs as they toiled along in that terrific heat that sapped the very strength of their heartbeats. Serves them right.

Or perhaps it wasn't their fault—maybe the artist double-crossed them, where Miss Montez got off easier because she has those nice curves. But remember what she says herself—"men and women take equal responsibilities and risks in our present civilization." Somebody's certainly getting gyped when it comes to clothes.

So watch it, Sergeant. The same clothes for the same planets—that's the motto. Protect both sexes. Put more on the women for Mars, less on the men for Venus. Otherwise, the mortality among your explorers is going to be terrific. You see, I know. I've been there.—67 Jane Street, New York 14, N. Y.

Now that you have peeled me out of my skin, Pee-lot Davis, I guess the old Sarge is dressed down for a sojourn on Venus. It wouldn't appease you any, I suppose, if I suggested meekly that our artists find it rather difficult to make the heroines look glamorous in a bulky pressure suit suitable for interplanetary exploration. No. I was afraid not. Well, I accept what you say, but I don't see what I can do about it. Perhaps we can arrange to paint the proper paraphernalia on our heroines and equip all our readers with X-ray glasses— Here! What am I saying?

Let's look at the next ether flash.

THREE TOLERABLE TALES

By Leo Carlson

Dear Sarge: Don't they ever censor mags? This last ish had only three good stories in it.

"Star of Treasure" was the best. It was well written and it was the kind that keeps you wondering what's going to happen next. Let's have more from this guy Harbaugh.

"Unsung Hero" hit second spot. It was a swell story for an amateur and it was written in an interesting way with plenty of humor. Let's have more of this kind.

"Gambler's Asteroid" pulled into third place by a length. Why do Martians always talk in that queer way, have they got twisted tongues or something? This story was pretty good only I still don't know why that babe let Patch Merrick go free.

The other stories were all the same, pretty poor, except for "Juke Box Asteroid" and "Battle of the Solar System" which were still worse.

"The Veil of Astellar" was pretty bad. I ex-

(Continued on page 111)

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THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

WE WERE going to present you with a couple of fine letters here on the genesis of the two featured long stories in this issue, but Sergeant Albert de Pina is so busy nowadays in Uncle Sam's Air Service that we simply could not contact him in time for his "alibi" for writing



PRIESTESS OF PAKMARI. We promise to do better with the next yarn we publish by this talented flying writer.

But we are not to be completely disappointed. Ross Rocklynne, author of this month's complete novel—THE GIANT RUNT—has written us a modest account of the inception of this splendid story. Before we show you his letter, let us tell you that Ross is passing a share of credit where we do not think it is due. Ideas come a dime a dozen; it's what a good craftsman makes of an idea that builds a story. And we think you will agree with us that Mr. Rocklynne has done a bang-up skookum job.

Here is what he says:

Where did the idea for THE GIANT RUNT come from?

I could easily throw the responsibility for the writing of this STORY BEHIND THE STORY sketch onto someone else's shoulders, simply by stating first-off the truth of the yarn's inception.

On the other hand, I could, with more effort, write for the readers of this magazine a varnished lie, in which I carefully trace, step by step, the tortuous mental path which led up to the writing of this short novel; could make the blanket statement that each and every story from a writer's pen is a symbolic word-picture of his own character; could reveal that at one time, to some extent I had a distinct penchant for writing stories dealing with the immensities; that I found myself switching over occasionally to stories that dealt with the infinitesimal, for no discernible reason, and that THE GIANT RUNT is a story that hovers in between; that the idea is my own, and emerged full-blown from a busy, alert mind—lifeless, but soon burning with the breath of life as my unconscious mind rushed messages pell-mell to the nine fingers which are operating this typewriter.

All that, in fact, is partly true—but only partly! It is seldom indeed that an author can state the exact moment when a story idea came. In this case, I can. It came in the mail one day, with a letter from the editor of this magazine asking me if I could make anything out of it.

Could I! Well, whether I did or not, remains for the reader to find out. The idea, completely embodied in the title, struck me as being a natural.

I was living in Hollywood then as I am now, and the West Coast was still on the alert for air-raids from Japan. (The dim-out here is squelched now, you know—they have what is called the "brown-

out.") The body of the plot fell into place slowly, circling the nucleus idea of a runt who finds himself surrounded by foot-high human beings.

I drew in as much of the Hollywood environment as I could—for what is a story about Hollywood without considerable mention of the movie industry—without reference to Sunset Boulevard, to Vermont Avenue, to Franklin Avenue, to Hollywood & Vine, one of the most famous corners in the world—without attention to the falsely-based hero-worship many people have for movie stars? All these I included in a manner, I hope, which does not make my part in the evolution of THE GIANT RUNT too insignificant.

Taking the idea suggested by the editor—of a normally runt-sized young man who suddenly finds himself surrounded by a world of foot-high people—in otherwise quite ordinary circumstances—I have tried to present you a logical story of how things would work out, including a certain amount of character growth. I earnestly hope I have succeeded in giving you a good story. Anyway, I tried.—Ross Rocklynnne.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 109)

pected more from Leigh Brackett. I also expected a better piece of writing from Ray Cummings.

The artwork was pretty snazzy. I liked those molars on those joes wallowing in the mud on the front cover. I wish I had one for a pet. Bergey's color scheme was pretty slick.

I enjoyed The Reader Speaks a lot, too. Why don't you just have one long story and about two shorts instead of a bunch of shorts and one story about 30 pages long? Huh?

I'm a member of the SFL and I'd like to know if there are any other members around my neighborhood or if there is a SFL chapter here in Seattle.

Well, I've run out of oxygen in my supply tank so I'll leave you now until the next ish.—8632 30th Ave., S.W., Seattle 6, Wash.

Anyway, it's nice that you liked the artwork, Kiwi Carlson. And what you say about the story lengths is diametrically opposed to one pee-lot's complaint a few rocket bursts back. He thinks the short novel in TWS is the same length as the book-length novel in STARTLING STORIES. How you pee-lots carry on!

CARROTHMETIC

By George W. Frank

Dear Sarge: SFL Member 4413, this John Hancock signer, wishes to introduce "carrothmetic" to "The Reader Speaks." That's me-own rating system for scientific stories, with 100 carrots per the entirety.

Carrots are first-class scientific vegetables, the elixir of health, the guaranty against becoming a Braillist, thus enabling readers to seize the supreme super-enjoyment from such swell scientificfiction. And whether you know it or not, you white-whiskered ring-eared old planet eater, Xeno is nil but distilled carrot juice with a golden sparkle.

So "carrothmetic" was born in the cranium of a carrot lover. First, and I hope you don't sneeze if I slap my time sedan into reverse, I wish to split "carrotoms" in the Winter Issue.

A GOD NAMED KROO deserves 30 of the 100 carrots, as Kuttner certainly dished up a humorous masterpiece. For a god though, Kroo was dumber and ficker and more kicked around than a dumb-yak. That was clever, making a dynamo an altar. Second comes THE INVISIBLE ARMY with 15 carrots—a yarnful of ingenuity, and no better fate than Maurer's could be wished on Hitler. Rocklynn deserves an orchid on his lapel.

Nerts to the scary-cats who can't stand a good nightmare, and I give VENUSIAN NIGHTMARE 12 carrots for third place. Smith did a great job weaving the action and data into the conversation. One big bundle of suspense throughout, but I agree with Lewis regarding a sequel.

10 carrots apiece to SWING YOUR LADY and SPACE COMMAND. For comedy Pete Manx supplies all the laughs, and the predicaments he don't make for himself! Harrigan's predicament, on the other hand, was inflicted by others, and the oxygen setup was good, but no one seemed to realize that this monster was just as nightmarish as the Medusa.

9 carrots to MOON TRAP, despite all Waible's happenstances, though West concocted a perfectly

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ridiculous Luna. The credit goes to his vivid imagination. Last and least is TROPHY, nil but jumbled nonsense. Unusual, yes, and quite puzzling, so I drop 4 carrots into a bushel of gnarly parsnips for it.

The remaining 10 carrots go to the features as a lump, and I might add that the rated "carrotment" includes the pictures. Belarski fell flat on the cover and should crawl under a rug for depicting a nightmare so nightmarelessly. The Medusa might just be a circus freak about to eat a piece of cake, while the gal would look more frightened if she saw a mouse, or even a beetle. She should look more scared whether she saw the Medusa or not.

How much different is Bergey's Spring Issue cover. That gal really looks scared and the mud-puppies have a life-like viciousness. Feminine charms, wow! But be careful, Sarge, if these future gals become any nearer to nudists, a certain postmaster may decide to cancel your second class rights. That would be a major disaster, brother!

Oh, what a pippin of a yarn is STAR OF TREASURE, right down my alley with 50 carrots. Not 20 carrots better than A GOD NAMED KROO though, because the high rating is partly due to the poor showing of the shorts. Harbaugh came through with a prize nugget that will require a lot of writing to surpass, but Einstein would croak laughing about anyone traveling so much faster than light. That basic energy is a blood brother to perpetual motion!

Running neck and neck for second place honors, with 10 carrots apiece, is JUKE BOX ASTEROID and UNSUNG HERO. The magnet turkey is an old roast but the jive dressing makes it good eating. And that Washburn dame sure can write laughs.

9 carrots crept under THE VEIL OF ASTELLAR, based on the scientific background, as I don't like such treacherous characters as Vance or such tragic-twist endings, though justifiable to this plot. The way Brackett came to write it is very interesting though, and admirable.

GAS ATTACK deserves 5 carrots, just for the clever surprise ending and making Jap beetles appear as real Japs. BATTLE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM is a flat fizzle for 3 carrots and loads of parsnips, ready to be peeled by a potato knife. Tubby's washed up if Cummings doesn't rejuvenate him with carrot vitamins. 3 carrots to GAMBLER'S ASTEROID, or rather to the illustration, as the story isn't worth parsnips and garlic. What the Sam Hill! I could work up better fantasies myself if I had Cummings' and Wellman's writing ability.

The features always rate the same—10 carrots. Maybe they deserve more, but the readers buy THRILLING WONDER STORIES for the yarns rather than for the features.

Well, Sarge, likely you are fed up on carrothmetic by now, so much so that this letter will likely hit the wastebasket under your personal cache of Xeno. The wastebasket is the last place Frog-eyes would expect to find your elixir of good old carrot juice.—*R. F. D. 2, Butler, Ohio.*

For a straight letter appraising the stories of TWS, Pee-lot Frank, you have done a nice job.

Before we shut down on the ether waves for this trip, there is one more communique dripping from the radio hook that looks promising. Let's have a whiff of it.

OF THIS AND THAT

By James Russell Gray

Dear Sarge: I notice in the Spring TWS that you ask if we letter writers can't discuss something besides the last issue of the magazine each time. Now, Sarge, I'm a nasty old man, and my first idea was that this might be a red herring. The Distract-Their-Attention-From-Weakpoints plan of action. But no! The thought is unworthy.

So, in a noble, all-out effort to furnish The Reader Speaks with material that will give it dignity and inspire learned discussion, I hereby submit this epistle.

Since I don't know just what you had in mind, I will have to try a lot of different subjects to accomplish my purpose. First, let's take a look at the immediate future. The radio, and much of the magazine advertising, promises us many radical, though pleasant, changes after the war. We are to have radio without static, pre-fabricated houses, television, flying flivvers and so on. Many of the "pipe dreams" of science-fiction are right here with us, just waiting for the war to end.

Isn't this a fertile field for discussion? I am working on a world-shaking invention myself. It is

a robot that will be manufactured by the government and given free to every citizen of voting age. This robot does all the necessary work, earning a living for its owner—while said owner stays at home drinking Xeno and reading TWS. It is hardly necessary to add that I also plan to run for congress; the actual work connected with the office to be done by my robot.

Would you like to discuss society? When humans live together in groups, certain laws and customs come into being to govern their relations, as we all know. Now, we who read (and publish) science-fiction have a better grasp of these things than others, since we think in broader terms. We owe a debt to the future to help make it a better place in which to live.

Instead of criticising the last issue of TWS, let's be making plans for the World of Tomorrow. Obviously, it is our duty. Personally, I suggest (for this future) free hospitalization, free education, free food, free shelter. I left out clothing, but according to the illustrations in TWS depicting the future we won't wear much clothing, especially the women. (You'll hear more about all this when I run for congress.)

Extra-sensory perception makes an interesting subject for discussion. I, personally, have been in touch with a man on Ganymede for some time. We contact each other by telepathy. His name is Raphael Rymegood, and he is poet laureate of the planet. He has wives scattered all over—a cyclone hit his harem. He tells me he is courting a blue woman now; it seems there was a fuel shortage up there this winter. So you see, ESP opens up whole new worlds for us.

Yes, Sarge, the more I think of it the better I like this idea of injecting something different into The Reader Speaks Department. A shot in the arm, a kick in the pants; to horse and away! "The world is full of a number of things not dreamed of in thy philosophy, Horatio." Or something.

I will take up the theory of relativity next time. So here's for a wider variety of subjects for discussion in the letter section. And put down that rocket wrench. It's all in fun.—*Box 204, Hartshorne, Okla.*

Pee-lot Gray, I am going to put you on duty in a special watch with Kiwi ko Tal. If you two junior astrogators don't set up a first-class medicine show and start selling Indian Bitters to the natives at every port of call this trip, I'll be a space monkey's uncle. Wait a minute! Maybe I am at that. Get back into your cages, gentlemen, and start tearing this present issue to pieces.

Frog-eyes, get me the powdered aspirin. Wart-ears, fetch a fresh case of Xeno from the refrigerator hold. I'm looking forward to an interesting voyage with this crew next trip.

THE AMATEUR STORY CONTEST

AH! THIS month, pee-lots, we have an announcement to make. After all the comets whiz by and the eight-ball drops into the side pocket, we have a prize winner

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The rules? Just type your story out in any length up to six thousand words on one side of standard white paper, double-spacing your lines and leaving about a one-inch margin around the border. Choose any subject you wish just so there is a science-fiction angle to it.

That's all. The only restriction is that you have never sold a story before. Address your manuscripts to the Amateur Story Contest Editor, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

The prizes? Payment for all winners at our regular professional rates. Honorable Mention for stories that are good but which do not quite make the grade. This contest runs constantly, and we earnestly want to discover new writers.

THE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE

THINGS are rather quiet on the SFL front at the moment, although you may have noted from comments in several of the letters in this issue that a number of new individual members have joined the League and are seeking nearby local chapters.

Walter Dunkelberger writes in that he is trying to organize a new chapter in Detroit. We expect to have more news for you from that direction next issue. Meanwhile, if others of you SFL members want to start a local chapter, get together a quorum of seven members, adopt a name, elect officers, frame a simple constitution—and write in to the mother league here in New York for a charter.

If you haven't yet joined the SFL as an individual, that's easy. Simply fill out and mail the application coupon you will find in this department and send it to us with the namestrip of this magazine. That's all—no expense or obligation. We will send you your membership card. Should you desire an emblem to wear, include 15c in stamps with your application, and the old Sarge will send you a swell gold, blue and maroon SFL button.

Happy Spacings.

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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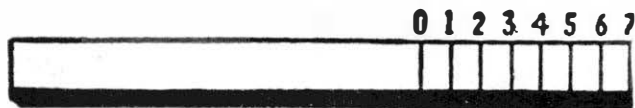
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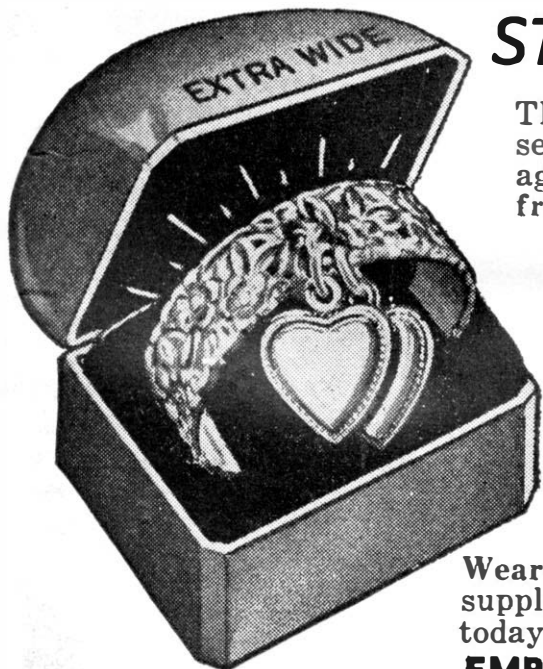


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