

FUTURE FICTION

15c — MARCH

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by EDMOND HAMILTON

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL
ISLES OF THE BLEST
by FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, Jr.



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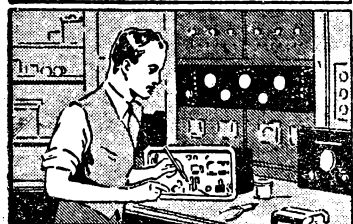
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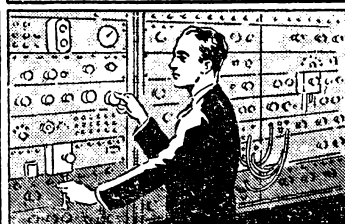
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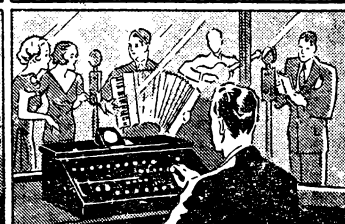
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FUTURE FICTION

Vol. 1, No. 2

March, 1940

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

ISLES OF THE BLEST *Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.* 8

Far below the waves and the mighty war on the surface, Don Harper matches weapons with pirates of the Spanish Main who should have died centuries ago! He must bring victory for the deathless Atlanteans, whose super-science comes out of the dim past to spell the fate of America!

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AFTER DOOMSDAY *John Cotton* 66

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THREE AMAZING SHORT STORIES

INTERPLANETARY GRAVEYARD *Edmond Hamilton* 56

Mark Raymond weeps as he approaches the grave of Ardra, taken by a strange malady while he was away on Jupiter—but terror strikes him as he finds her body missing and strange footprints leading into the distance!

AS IN THE BEGINNING *Jack Williamson* 85

War is Death . . . but as long as two remain in the end, the world cannot die, for Peace is Life

RING AROUND THE SUN *Isaac Asimov* 89

Hell in reverse temperature—that's what Jimmy and Roy were going through in their little space-ship! Tricked into the dangerous trip, ironic fate caused them to freeze at 40 below, though they were almost in the sun!

SPECIAL FEATURES

FUTURE FACTS *Editorial* 55

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COVER BY SCOTT
"Monsters and Men"

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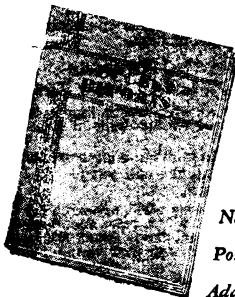
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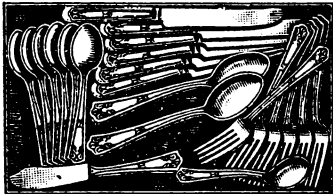
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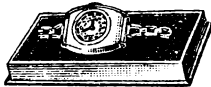


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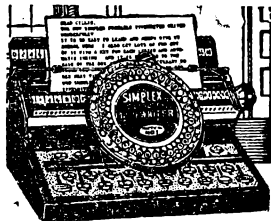
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Save 2 cents by filling-in, pasting & Mailing this Coupon on a 1c Post Card **TODAY**.

Print your last name plainly below

ISLES OF THE BLEST

by **FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER Jr**

The "Isles of the Blest," legend called them—and they sank once again, bringing Don Harper to the floor of the sea, where he is brought into the domain of the immortal Atlanteans and their weird sciences! Here he must battle with ancient pirates, an eerie conflict in this forgotten world beneath the sea, that, in a strange way, decides the fate of his native land!



CHAPTER I SHIPWRECK

THE sea was heavy, sluggish, and the S-98 rolled rhythmically as she nosed forward under throttled Diesels. She was not a new craft, having been launched

in 1945, but two double-purpose deck guns, an a. a. pompom battery, made her quite as formidable above water as the latest subs.

Lieutenant Commander Donald Harper, standing in the shadow of the conning tower, scanned the leaden sky a trifle



"Needs must employ more skill than that!"

anxiously. They were less than fifty miles from the Canaries, and the risk of being spotted by enemy planes was great. Still, Harper reflected, the low-hanging clouds were a protection, and he would go "under" in another half-hour. It was best to remain on the surface as long as possible . . . the men would get their fill of submersion from now on.

Harper's gaze shifted from the sky to the horizon. If only he could spot one of those tell-tale wisps of smoke that would indicate a Eurasian war-ship hurrying to the great rendezvous at Teneriffe! The loss of even one battle-wagon might upset their plans, delay the attack upon America. . . .

The clang of cleated shoes upon the steel

deck-plates interrupted Don's reflections. McKane, the S-98's radio operator, was running toward him.

"Message from Chief of Operations, sir," he explained, extending a typed slip. "I've decoded it."

Harper glanced at the radiogram.

"Enemy Asiatic squadron makes presence of fleet in Pacific vital," he read. "Imperative all units in Atlantic act to retard European crossing until coast defenses strengthened. Bloch, Chief of Operations."

Harper crushed the paper into his pocket. The meaning beneath the terse official wording was plain. The main U. S. fleet was having a rough time of it against the

superior Asiatic forces of the enemy, and the subs and light cruisers of the Atlantic squadron were to sacrifice themselves in an attempt to weaken the overwhelming European armada of the Alliance. Don Harper grinned crookedly at McKane.

"Doesn't look so good, does it?" he said. "God knows what a few subs and cruisers can do against the combined fleets of Europe! And if we don't succeed in holding them back, America is . . ."

"Lieutenant!" McKane's fingers dug into his arm. "Listen!"

DON froze. Somewhere above them a dull, ominous drone was audible. An instant later three hawk-like bombers broke through the bank of clouds!

"Planes!" McKane cried. "We'd better submerge . . .!"

"No good!" Harper snapped, whirling about. "They'll be carrying depth charges! Before we could dive deep enough, they'd have us! Man the guns!"

The next half-minute was a mad delirium. McKane's shouts down the hatchway drew a breathless crowd of men from the S-98's interior. Harper had succeeded in ripping the tarpaulin from one of the three-inchers when he was joined by the gun's crew, lean, weatherbeaten men wearing life belts. Vaguely, Harper remembered slipping into a cork jacket, also, as he shouted crisp orders. The deck hatches were open, now, and shells were being brought up in the ammunition hoists.

THE three planes, zooming downward at 600 m. p. h., were already less than two miles away. A burst of machine gun fire from them tore up the water at the right of the S-98. Harper swore with relief as the two deck guns began to roar a staccato chorus. Tiny white clouds, like powder puffs, appeared alongside the diving planes. On the after deck, the pompom began its hollow popping.

The gun crews worked like robots, feeding shells into the hungry chambers, slamming home the breech-locks, yanking the lanyards. Little chance to aim, to set fuses! Speed was the main essential.

"Here!" Harper beckoned to the men who were emerging from the hatch with light machine guns, boxes of ammunition. "Quick!"

Swiftly the two machine guns were set up on the deck, adjusted. Harper knelt beside one and an instant later its chatter was rising in harsh obligato to the thunder of the guns.

The enemy planes were close, now. A hail of bullets from their blunt noses rattled like a pneumatic riveter upon the S-98's deck plates. Two men from the forward gun-crew fell, but others ran to take their places.

Harper, forcing a new belt into his machine gun, looked up as a cheer broke from the men. One of the bombers had disintegrated in midair; from the cloud of black smoke shattered fragments were falling. Then, almost simultaneously, another of the planes spun out of control, fluttered seaward.

"Nice work!" Harper cried. "Now if we just nail the last one . . ."

The third plane had not checked its dive. The sound of its motor rose to a macabre, siren-like whine. Harper had a momentary glimpse of polished metal, of gleaming glass, as the plane swept a scant thousand feet above the submarine. Firing blindly, Don put a burst of machine-gun bullets into the bomber's belly, saw it wobble, out of control. But even as it fell, two black objects dropped from its bomb racks. Quite instinctively, Don ducked, threw up a shielding arm. At that instant the black objects struck abaft the conning tower. A dazzling flash, a deafening roar, and the underseas craft leaped like a harpooned whale. One brief, horrible picture, Don had, of the distorted, bloody face of the man beside him, then it seemed that a cruel

hammer landed upon his temple. Abruptly the world dissolved into darkness.

It was the throbbing, aching pain in his head which at length prodded Don Harper into consciousness. Dazedly, he parted his lips, gasped for air . . . only to receive a mouthful of water. Then, sputtering, he was aware of a hand gripping the strap of his life-belt; turning, he saw McKane floating beside him.

"Mac!" he whispered. "What happened?"

"The S-98 sank, Lieutenant," McKane replied. "Took the rest of the boys down with her. You and I were thrown clear by the explosion, avoided the undertow when she sank. I found you floating, held up by your cork jacket. Been hanging onto you since. Two, three hours at least."

Harper glanced about. Grey sky, grey sea . . . these and no more. The water, in spite of the latitude, was cold. He shivered.

"Looks bad, eh, Mac?" he muttered. "A good fifty miles to the Canaries, and a prison camp if by some miracle we should reach them. Which isn't likely without being able to get our bearings."

McKane, his face drawn, blue, nodded sadly.

"Maybe the others were the lucky ones, sir," he said. "Drowning's painless, they say. And we're apt to float like corks for days, until thirst and hunger . . ." He broke off as a wave engulfed his head.

"You're right," Don gasped. "Might as well do what we can, though." He slipped off his belt, passed it under the straps of both his and McKane's life preservers, buckled it again. "Now we won't get separated. The Canaries are somewhere east of here. What with current and drift we've practically no chance of reaching them, but it'll ease my conscience to try."

"Right, sir." McKane glanced at the sun, a whitish disk burning through the clouds. Then, turning eastward, "Let's go!"

For hours the two men swam, until, as the sun was dropping to the horizon, exhaustion forced them to cease. Weighed down by soaked uniforms, eyes stinging from the salt water, they surrendered themselves to the mercy of the current. Already their mouths were dry, cottony, their bodies cramped from cold.

"No—no use, Lieutenant," McKane choked. "I'm about done in. Even . . . possibility of being picked up by ships . . . is out. War's cleaned sea of commerce. Better to slip off life-belts, get it over with."

Don made no reply. There was nothing to look forward to other than slow death. They had covered only a fraction of the distance to the Canaries. And there was no other land except the islands . . . Don glanced at his companion. McKane's head had slumped forward, chin resting on the edge of his cork jacket; he seemed all but unconscious.

Harper tried to resume swimming, but his cramped muscles refused to obey. A terrible lethargy was stealing over him; nothing seemed to matter a great deal. Death came sooner or later; perhaps to unfasten the life belt, free his spirit of this aching, tortured body . . .

Suddenly, lifted high by a huge comber, Don gasped. Ahead of him, golden in the light of the sunset, lay a strip of sandy shore, sloping gently upward to dense masses of trees and shrubbery!

"Mac!" he cried, shaking the inert radio operator. "Mac! Land!"

McKane glanced about, dully, then frowned in disbelief.

"Couldn't be Tenerife," he muttered. "Not . . . not in only couple of hours . . . And maps show no land west of Canaries. Must be . . . mirage . . ."

Don drew a deep breath. Something faint, elusive, was noticeable in the salty tang of the sea air. All at once he recognized it as the perfume of flowers, of fruit, and his heart leaped.

"Mirage, hell!" he cried. "I can *smell* land! Come on!" Revived by hope, he began to swim toward the strange shore, dragging McKane with him. Within a half-hour, he heard the rumble of breakers, saw green palm trees waving against the sky. Then a big wave picked them up, swept them through a welter of foam and spray onto the firm white sand of the beach.

CHAPTER II

THE ISLE SUBMERGES

DON HARPER was not a particularly imaginative sort . . . the submarine service of the United States Navy is no place for starry-eyed dreamers . . . yet his first glimpse of this mysterious coast upon which they had been cast filled him with a species of awe. It was, somehow, unreal. On all sides rose trees, great flowering shrubs . . . none of which seemed in any way to resemble those of the normal everyday world. Orchards of strange golden fruit, weird ferns, as high as a man's head, masses of vari-colored flowers, filling the air with an intoxicating perfume.

McKane also was struck by their bizarre surroundings. Stretched wearily upon the sand, he glanced about, frowning.

"What . . . what d'you make of this place, sir?" he demanded. "It doesn't seem exactly . . . well, you might say, human, to me. You don't suppose we died out there and this is some sort of Here-after!"

"I don't see any angels," Don chuckled. "And I didn't think spirits had headaches." He touched his blood-caked forehead.

"Guess you're right." The radio operator nodded sombrely. "Still, we didn't swim fifty miles in three hours. I've been to the Canaries before, and they never had trees or bushes like these. And if we're not in the Canaries, where on earth are we?"

Harper stared at the curious vegetation a moment before speaking.

"Search me," he murmured. "I'd say it was a toss-up between heaven and the Isles of the Blest."

"The Isles of the Blest?" McKane repeated. "What're they?"

"A queer old legend." Don peeled off his coat, shirt, pistol-holster, spread them out to dry. "I read a book about 'em, once. This particular stretch of sea, just west of the Canaries, is where the Isles are supposed to be located—beautiful islands that appear and disappear without warning, according to the old navigators. Ptolemy, the mathematician, mentioned them, and Clavijo, too. And sometime in the sixth century a couple of saints, Brandon and Malo, visited the islands. Two highly reputable Portuguese mariners, Vello and later Verde, landed on the Isles. So did a Frenchman, Galindo. All three brought back specimens of vegetation, and tales of great marvels. Each visit ended abruptly when the islands disappeared, sank beneath the waves!"

"Sank!" McKane repeated. "You mean they were forever popping up and down like . . . like a sub?"

"That's the story." There was a curious note of seriousness beneath Harper's light tone. "It's not so queer, after all. Take Falcon Island in the Pacific, for instance. In 1865 it was only a reef. Twenty years later it was an island a mile and a quarter long. By and by it disappeared, only to bob up again in a couple of months twice as big as before. Pretty soon it had sunk to a reef again and by 1921 was gone altogether."

"But that was only a rocky shoal," McKane muttered. "And these isles, you say . . ."

"The Isles were always full of trees and shrubs. Time and again they'd be seen from Teneriffe or Palma." Harper stretched lazily, basking in the rays of the setting sun. "The old dons sent expedition after expedition from the Canaries to find them, without luck. Big parties they were, some

of 'em having three and four ships. An expedition would come back, pronounce the whole thing a fake, and the excitement would die down. Then they'd be seen again, fishermen would be blown upon their shores, and another expedition would set out. So it went for hundreds of years. In 1759 the whole village of Alaxero saw the Isles off their coast, viewed the queer shrubbery through telescopes. The natives still see the islands from time to time, but don't say much for fear of being laughed at. Funny, isn't it?"

McKANE'S eyes flicked apprehensively toward the masses of odd vegetation behind them.

"It . . . it sort of makes you think, doesn't it, sir?" he said. "This place seems to fill the bill exactly. Soon as we've rested up a bit, I'd like to have a look at the interior. Maybe . . ." The radio operator's voice trailed off into a gasp of horror. "God Almighty! Lieutenant Harper! Look! The . . . waves . . ."

"What is it?" Don sprang to his feet, followed McKane's gaze. Suddenly a chill of pure terror swept over him. Something . . . something utterly unbelievable was happening to the great combers that swept in from the sea. Instead of flowing over the beach, they were surging angrily against . . . nothingness! An invisible wall seemed to be checking the foaming breakers, holding them back from the strip of sand! Harper could hear them faintly, crashing against the empty air, could see trickles of up-flung water running down a great breakwater that was not there!

"McKane!" he gasped. "It . . . it's just as though a huge sheet of glass had risen from the beach! Or maybe a dome placed over the island! Only you can see glass . . ." Cautiously Harper advanced toward the raging waves, arms extended. Suddenly he stopped. "I . . . I . . . something is holding me back! Just as the waves are being held back on the other side! You

can't feel anything . . . you just stop!—like a man in armor would stop if he tried to walk toward a repelling magnet!"

McKane did not answer. Face grey, he was staring at the breakers beating against the invisible barrier.

"Then . . . then we're trapped in this crazy place!" he muttered. "It's not real, Lieutenant! It can't be! We must be dreaming all this!"

Harper shook a weary, doubtful head, was about to reply when a tremor shook the beach. Gentle, hardly more than a quiver, it was like an extremely mild earthquake. Then, before his startled gaze, the line of foaming breakers began to rise! Higher and higher they rose, until the green wall of water was like a barricade about the beach.

"Lieutenant!" The radio operator's voice rose to a terrified scream. "The island! It . . . it's sinking!"

Don Harper stared at the ever-rising wall of green. As it increased in height, it curved ever inward. This strange land seemed to be covered by an invisible dome . . . a dome which held back the waters of the Atlantic as the island sank! Now the sky was merely a blue circle, high above, and as they watched this circle shrank, disappeared. Trapped in a gargantuan diving bell, they had descended beneath the surface of the sea!

"Good God!" Don's voice shook in spite of himself. "The Isles of the Blest!"

For a long time neither man spoke. Stunned, they watched the vast pageant of marine life passing outside. Fish of all sorts flashed past the dome . . . fish of every size, shape and color. As they descended, the water took on a deep translucent blue, alive with orange and black bumpheads, spiky giant sun-fish, striped Moorish idols, brilliant butterfly fish. Deeper and deeper the weird island sank, until the last vestige of sunlight was lost. Yet instead of being plunged in darkness, the space beneath the invisible dome was

illuminated by a diffused golden light, a soft and sourceless glow, as though infinitesimal particles of yellow dust hung suspended in the air.

As the dome-shielded island descended, the sea-life beyond changed. Now there were queer luminous fish, all but transparent, curious little sea-devils bearing phosphorescent lanterns at the end of long, rod-like projections between their eyes, baroque creatures with eyes directed upward and bones visible through their bodies. Once an immense black monster, grotesque, terrifying, flashed by the invisible dome, then whirled, disappeared in the darkness.

HOW long the two men stood gazing at this breath-taking parade of marine life, they did not know. At length, however, there was a gentle bump, and Harper could see the ocean's floor, adorned with streamers of sea-weed, revealed in the eerie light from within the dome.

"We've hit bottom!" he announced grimly. "This makes submarines look cheap, eh, Mac?"

Awe-stricken, McKane nodded.

"What . . . what next?" he muttered. "D'you think we dare try that queer fruit on those trees yonder? God only knows what lies inland!" He glanced nervously over his shoulder. "An island at the bottom of the Atlantic! It's mad! And us marooned here with no way of ever reaching the surface!"

Don Harper straightened up, squared his shoulders.

"Mac," he said solemnly, "we've found what the ancient dons spent three hundred years looking for! The Isles of the Blest! From now on anything can . . . and probably will . . . happen! We . . ."

"Lieutenant!" McKane gasped. "Look!"

Don swung about. Emerging from the underbrush, perhaps a hundred yards down the beach, was a man!—a tall, lean man, muffled in a dark cloak of strangely archaic

cut. In spite of himself, Harper felt a cold sweat break out upon his brow.

The tall man, apparently, had not seen the two castaways. From beneath his cloak he drew a queerly shaped tube, pointed it toward the sea. At the end of the tube a red beam of light snapped off and on, in a series of swift flashes!

"Code!" Harper whispered. "He's signaling to someone . . . something . . . out on the ocean's floor!"

"Whatever he's about we know now that there're people here! Living people!" McKane shook an incredulous head. "I'm going to contact him! Hey, you! You with the light! Hey!" The little radio operator ran swiftly toward the cloaked figure.

At the sound of McKane's voice, the tall man swung about, thrust the signal light beneath his mantle. Don could not see his face, for the collar of the cloak rose to his eyes; but something in the man's attitude spoke of anger, of hatred. Swiftly Harper ran to join McKane.

The radio operator was only a few feet from the stranger, now.

"Listen, mister!" he was saying. "We're strangers here! Shipwrecked! Maybe you can tell us where we're at!"

The dark man swore, threw back his cloak. At once a long bright rod, not unlike a sword, glittered in his hand; its hilt, Don could see, was shaped like a silver porpoise.

"Mac!" he cried. "Look out!"

It was too late. Before the stunned McKane could leap back, the stranger's arm had flashed out, the shining rod touched his questioner's forehead. A thin wisp of smoke went up, a sickening smell of charred flesh tainted the air, and McKane slumped limply to the sand.

"Good God!" Don's face went white with rage. McKane, the inoffensive little radio operator, cut down in cold blood! Killed, because he had asked a question!

The man in the cloak, his shining weapon aloft, sprang toward Harper, spitting oaths

in a strange sibilant language. Instinctively, Don reached for his automatic, then realized that he had left it, with his coat and shirt, upon the sand to dry. The sight of McKane's inert body, however, drove all caution from his brain. Fists knotted, face suffused with fury, he plunged toward their unknown assailant.

With a muffled laugh, the cloaked man drew back his weapon, ready for the kill. At that instant, however, there was a sound of voices, a crashing of the underbrush back from the beach. For a split second the murderer hesitated, then, sheathing his silver-hilted rod, plunged into the jungle in the opposite direction from the approaching voices.

Don, paying no heed to the fleeing murderer, fell to his knees beside McKane. The little man lay upon his back; there was a strange, blue-black mark upon his forehead. A touch of his wrist revealed him to be dead; the cloaked man's queer weapon was, apparently, sure, instantaneous. Don clenched his fists. Little Mac, slain without quarter by the inhabitant of this nightmare island! His last link with the world above had been severed, leaving him alone among these merciless killers!

All at once Don was aware of the crashing in the brush, a deep, booming voice behind him.

"By Thor! Strangers, and murderous ones to boot! Look, Master Humphrey!"

Don whirled. Facing him were two figures so incredible as to take his breath away. One of them, a huge, yellow-bearded man, was dressed in the garb of a Viking, with horned helmet, round brazen shield, and great two-handed sword. The other, smaller and more dapper, wore the long hose and slashed doublet of Elizabethan England. A slender rapier hung at his side, a grim note offset by his gay blue eyes, his curly hair, his pleasant, open countenance. At sight of McKane's sprawled body, however, his expression grew stern.

"Faith, Sven!" he broke out. "Murder

most vile! Yonder knave must needs be strung up by the heels!"

Dazed, bewildered, Don shot a glance toward his pistol, lying upon the coat and shirt a hundred paces up the beach. No time to reach them, now; the hulking Norseman was bearing down upon him. With a sudden leap he plunged forward, crashing his fist against the Viking's bearded jaw. Gasping, the big man sat down heavily upon the sand. Quickly Don whirled to face the slim Englishman . . . whirled just in time to see the blunt, rod-like blade of what he had believed to be a rapier, flashing toward his head.

Instinctively Don threw up a guarding arm . . . but it was too late. The point of the queer weapon touched his temple . . . still aching from the explosion of the bombs which sank the S-98 . . . and Harper sank into an abyssmal black void lit by a million dazzling stars.

CHAPTER III KARSIS ATTACKS

THE room in which Don Harper awakened was cool, lit, as all this mysterious land seemed to be lighted, by a soft golden glow. Curiously, Don glanced about. The chamber was richly furnished, with brilliant tapestries, thick rugs, massive oaken furniture. Don stared, puzzled, at the huge blocks of stone that made up the roof, the walls . . . and then recollection flooded through his mind. The cloaked man, McKane's death, the two bizarre figures who had attacked him. . . .

A sudden patter of footsteps roused Harper. He sat up on the couch in time to see the curtains at the other end of the room part, revealing a slender, dark-haired girl clad in flowing skirts and high bodice. She smiled, a gay infectious smile that seemed to linger in her eyes after it had faded from her lips.

"So, sir!" she laughed. "Alive and none

the worse for your experience! Good news indeed! Master Humphrey was persuaded that he had slain you!"

"So sorry to have to disappoint Master Humphrey," Don grinned. "But . . . don't you think you might tell me where I am?"

"This is the island of Thylos," the girl said gravely. "Sometimes called the Land of St. Borondon. It is, as you will find, one of the Isles of the Blest."

"The Isles of the Blest!" Don exclaimed. "Then I was right after all! But . . . but, what holds back the water? And what makes the island rise up and down? And . . . well, who are you?"

"Lud, sir!" The girl threw up her hands. "I vow you'll smother me with questions! First of all, the Atlanteans have for thousands of years known the secret of gravity, by which they both hold back the water and raise the island. And as for me, I am Mistress Anne Ross, late of Philadelphia, who, along with my father Captain John Ross, suffered shipwreck upon this island in the year 1798. We were the sole survivors of those aboard the brig 'Yorktown'!"

"What!" Don exclaimed. "Seventeen-ninety-eight! But . . . Good God! that's over a hundred and fifty years ago! You couldn't have lived . . ."

"'Tis hardly gentlemanly of you, sir," the girl laughed, "to so doubt a lady's word! Yet I forgive you, seeing you are strange to these isles! Know, then, that the same field of force which creates this 'dome' about the island also prevents death by natural means. The human body, so old Ahu relates at great length, is composed of tiny organisms, like the cells of a beehive. These cells, if properly nourished and cleansed, live forever, as therefore does the human body. This field of force, destroying all poisons and germs within our bodies, renders us immortal. For more than this you must seek old Ahu, who likes nothing more than interminable discourses concerning such matters."

DON reflected upon her words. That the cells were immortal was well known. Carrel's celebrated chicken heart had survived for years under proper care. But a field, a ray, that would cleanse human tissue, as the Frenchman cleansed his sliver of chicken heart. . . .!

"It's unbelievable!" he muttered. "How . . ."

"Nay, sir!" Anne Ross shook her head. "Enough of questions for one day! Sven and Master Humphrey are waiting even now to tender their apologies!" She left the room to return a moment later followed by the giant Viking, the slim Englishman.

"So, good sir," the latter smiled. "Your pate, it seems, is tougher than honest Sven's jaw. He still suffers an ache where you smote him."

"Aye," the big man rumbled, wagging his yellow beard. "A shrewd blow, lad! This fighting with bared fists is less of child's sport than it seems! Yet the blow was no more than my due. We were wrong to have believed you a murderer!"

"A murderer!" Don exclaimed. "Then you thought . . ."

"Consider," the Englishman cut in. "We step from the gorse, we behold you bending over a dying man. Would we have thought otherwise? Yet after closer inspection, we see that your companion has been slain with a shock-stick, of which you had none. Also, there were other footprints. Therefore we apologize for our unjust violence."

"Right!" Don nodded. "But who do you think killed my friend? If I ever find him . . ." His eyes narrowed.

"As to that," Sven boomed, "'tis hard to say. We here are a peaceful folk, saving perhaps an occasional bit of swordplay with the men of Karsis. Yet even a Karsisian could not have done this, since none may penetrate the shell of force. Perhaps Ahu may find some way of tracking him."

Don struggled upright, with an effort.

"Weak as a kitten," he muttered. "Those

rods you carry pack some wallop!"

"Eh?" Humphrey puzzled a moment over the unfamiliar slang, then smiled. "Ah, yes! The electric rods are an invention of the priests of Atlantis. You are fortunate, sir, that I gave you but a quarter charge. Full force would have slain you, as it did your companion. These shock-sticks we fashion in the form of swords . . . rapiers, cutlasses, broadswords like Sven's . . . whatever weight and length we were accustomed to before being cast upon these shores."

"Then you were shipwrecked upon this island, too?" Don asked.

"Aye." Sven nodded. "In a dragon ship under Olaf Red-beard, I sailed, to harry the Frankish coasts. And the sea-gods drove us upon this coast where all were saved."

"And I," Master Humphrey said, "being a younger son and thus without hope of falling heir to the Falworth estates, took ship with a party of adventurous gentlemen bound for the Spanish Main. Our caravel foundered and I, by God's grace, succeeded in swimming to this wondrous isle."

"So we are all castaways together," Anne Ross laughed, "living in Davy Jones' locker. My father has gone to a meeting of the Council and will inform them of your presence here . . ." She paused as a lean dark man, wearing the leather helmet and goggles of an aviator, entered the room. "Ah! Master Varhely! You will be happy to know this gentleman who has taken your place as our most recent arrival!"

"Delighted!" Varhely grinned. "We should have a lot in common, being of the same era—though I feel like an old inhabitant even if it has been only two months since my plane crashed." He turned to the girl. "The council has met and asks that our young friend appear before them, if he feels strong enough."

Anne glanced questioningly at Don, who nodded.

"Very well," she said. "Your clothes are in this closet, here. Master Varhely and I will meet you outside." With a rustle of silk, a flashing smile, she took the aviator's arm, left the room.

His clothes, Don found, were intact, including the coat, shirt, and pistol-belt he had left upon the sand. Buckling the automatic at his side brought him a new feeling of confidence; shoulders squared, he followed Sven and Humphrey along a wide corridor to the main entrance of the building.

AS DON stepped from the doorway, he gave a cry of amazement. Before them, farther down the long green slopes, lay a city . . . a city that staggered the imagination! Great cyclopean masses of white stone reared upward, ponderous, unyielding, cloaked in hoary age. Wide streets, gardens, broke the rows of huge buildings, while the country surrounding the city was a paradise of flowers, trees, lakes. Towers, pyramids, and temples of behemoth construction rose above the lesser structures; it was like the work of titans, putting the efforts of the Egyptians, the Incas . . . even he modern world, to shame. Designed by master craftsmen of another age, the city of Thylos seemed, like its inhabitants, to defy time. Don stared at it, fascinated, until Anne touched his arm.

"Come!" she whispered. "The Council waits!"

Awestruck, Don followed her down the winding highway into the city. Here the streets were lined with graceful dwellings, shops, even taverns. Somehow, it reminded Don of Pompeii . . . except that this city was teeming with life and activity. Men and women of every race, every age, thronged its temples, its bazaars, its markets. Predominant among them were tall, white-robed men who had the grave, aloof air of ancient Egyptians; yet though these were in the majority, there were

many others to give the streets brilliant color, Frenchmen, in ruffs and laces, tall knights in clanking armor, swarthy Phoenicians, Moorish warriors in white turbans, sturdy whalers and man-o-war's men, side-whiskered mariners of the nineteenth century. A pageant of the ages surged through this city, a mile beneath the surface of the sea!

At length, after a half-hour's walking, Don and the four oddly assorted people with him found themselves before an immense building of black porphyry, its surface covered with bas-reliefs of strange monsters, curious denizens of the ocean's depths. Brilliantly conceived and executed, these carvings seemed, in the golden half-light, almost alive. Naiads, tritons, mermaids, marched in solemn procession along the walls, seemingly about to step from the gleaming stone.

At the entrance of the temple, Don's companions paused, motioned him forward. Through rows of huge pillars he made his way, dazed by the sheer splendor of the place, until at last he found himself in a great circular chamber ablaze with golden ornaments, jewelled tapestries. A faint odor of perfume lent mystery, while purple shadows lay like crouching monsters at the base of the mighty columns. Tall guardsmen, gorgeously apparelled attendants were ranged along the walls.

Upon a richly carved dais of ancient ebony sat seven solemn figures, staid, immobile, partaking of the majestic grandeur of this council hall. Five of the figures were sombre, white-robed men, one wore mediaeval chain mail, and the last was ruddy-faced, grey-haired, clad in blue coat and kneebreeches. Bluff, kindly eyed, he seemed at first incongruous beside his grave companions; yet a second glance showed this colonial mariner to be shrewd, tolerant, understanding, and possessed of calm dignity.

"Welcome, sir." The man in the blue coat nodded to Don. "I am Captain Ross,

at whose home you have been recovering. We of this Council have had you brought here to learn what we can concerning the death of your companion. You will tell us all you know."

Don glanced about. Studying the golden statues, the queer hieroglyphics upon the marble walls, he was struck by the unreality of the scene. A dream, he kept repeating to himself, a dream! The great shadowy hall, the bizarre white-robed figures, this fantastic world beneath the sea. . . . Swiftly he told his story. When he had finished, a wrinkled, white-bearded man who sat in the center of the dais, stood up; old, with the wisdom of the ages in his faded eyes, he was somehow godlike.

"The youth speaks the truth," he quavered. "Without a shock-stick, how could he have slain his companion? My heart is heavy that in our peaceful land there is one who has shed blood. We must discuss this thing at length in an attempt to learn who brings death to the isles of the immortals." He turned to Don. "Doubtless you have wondered at all you have seen since fate threw you upon these shores. And since you are now one of us, it may be well for you to learn somewhat of our history. Listen, then!"

Old Ahu paused a moment, then commenced to speak.

"Know you that this, and another small bit of land are all that remain of the once-mighty lands of Atlantis. Great was the country of our forefathers, stretching from the Pillars of Hercules to the lands of the Mayas. And to all parts of the world our ships journeyed, spreading the light of learning to lesser peoples. Yet our greatness was our undoing, since it brought pride, and the envy of the gods. In the reign of mighty Menes the priests and wise men, skilled in science, prophesied the wrath of the gods, the sinking of our homeland. Some heeded this warning, fleeing to Egypt, to the domain of the Incas, to the

distant east. Yet many, swollen with pride, remained in Atlantis, scoffing at the wise men. And these in the end were destroyed."

FOR a space old Ahu remained silent, seemingly lost in memories. When he spoke again his voice trembled.

"Of all the glory of Atlantis, this hilltop, and another nearby, were the most dear, being holy spots, adorned with temples and great works. And one among the priests of Atlantis, Knem of exalted memory, wished to preserve them, for they were sacred to the true believers. Long had the men of Atlantis known the secret of anti-gravity, using it to hoist great blocks of stone, to erect mighty pyramids. This force Knem sought to use in a work vast beyond compare . . . to keep these two hilltops above the level of the flood that was soon to come."

"Twice a hundred thousand slaves labored on that great task, burrowing into the hillsides, cutting the tops of the hills from their bases, building vast machines to be run by tide and wave, which would generate this force of anti-gravity. And as they labored, the sea swept through the lowlands of Atlantis, engulfing cities, farms, villages . . . bringing death and disaster. At length, when the waves lapped the base of the two hills, Knem made offering to the gods, set his engines in operation. Then did the miracle occur. For though the land sank, carrying with it all of Atlantis, these two hilltops, borne up by the great forces Knem had unleashed, remained above the surface of the waves!"

The old man nodded sombrely, fingering the gold bands about his arm.

"And so," he continued, "for century after century the nobility of Atlantis dwelt here, secluded, cut off from the savage outer world. Then, gradually, those on the mainland emerged from savagery once more, recaptured some of the lost arts.

Ships were built, and, as some of these were cast upon our shores, we realized that before many years had passed, these barbarians from the mainland must increase, build greater ships, invade our sanctuary. In fear for our peace, we consulted the gods . . . and a way was revealed to us. The anti-gravity that held us upon the surface of the sea could be lessened to lower us below the waves! And the same force could be used to hold back the waters in a dome above us. Trees, shrubs, would freshen the air, water, filtered of its salt, admitted, and the atmosphere excited to luminosity by the field of force. So, like the rest of Atlantis, we sank beneath the waves!"

"Then came the great change. The forces employed to shield our lands had a strange effect. Destroying all germs and viruses, neutralizing the poisons of the body, they arrested cell decay, rendered us immortal! Yet though we now possessed more than any other mortal had before, the longing for the upper world would come upon us. From time to time we raised the islands to the surface, removed the dome of force, and revelled in clean air, warm sunlight again. It was during these periods on the surface that castaways reached us, were thrown upon our shores. From them we learned many languages, including your ~~English~~ish. And these castaways we did not permit to depart, fearing their release might bring others, to spoil us of our riches. Nor did they wish to leave, giving up immortality, peace, for the savage world outside."

"What!" Don Harper leaned forward, frowning. "You mean I'm to stay here . . . forever?"

"Would you prefer," Ahu smiled, "the war, the death, of your world?"

"But you don't understand!" Don cried. "My country, America, is in danger! The combined forces of Asia and Europe are attacking it! I . . . I've got to get back, do my part!"

For a moment there was silence in the great hall, then Ahu spoke again.

"These things are soon forgotten in the mists of time," he said gently. "All of those here have seen the struggles of their people, so important at the moment, disappear, give way to new wars. For so long as man exists, there is always strife." His voice grew sad. "Even here . . ."

As though in answer to Ahu's words there came a roar of voices from the entrance of the great building. A clash of steel, hoarse shouts, rose like distant thunder. Suddenly Sven, his yellow hair bristling, ran toward them through the rows of massive pillars.

"Out arms!" he shouted. "Haste! The men of Karsis attack the locks!"

CHAPTER IV THE SISTER ISLE

PANDEMONIUM reigned in the great columned hall. In response to orders from the council, glittering guardsmen, attendants, surged toward the entrance, gripping their electric rods. Bewildered, Don followed them to the street outside. The city resounded to war-cries of every age, every race. Men, hastily buckling on weapons, were assembling in squares, in roadways. Moslem warriors, gripping scimitar-like shock-swords, mailed knights waving spiked maces, bare-legged sailors armed with cutlasses, haughty Spaniards in damascened armor. Don, pushing between a sturdy Roman and a tall Atlantean, found himself facing Humphrey Falworth.

"So, Master Harper!" The Englishman grinned. "You arrive in time for the first squabble these fifty years past! Stick by me and I'll show you sport unequalled!"

Don nodded, clung to Humphrey's side as they wormed their way through the shouting throngs. Along streets packed with polyglot crowds they were swept, arriving at length before a huge circular en-

trance near the edge of the city. Dark, cavernous, walls beaded with sweat, it reminded Don of a New York subway. It seemed, he noticed, to extend beyond the dome of force that shielded the undersea island. Here and there on the floor lay sprawling figures, smeared with blood, though whether men of Thyllos or the mysterious invaders he could not be sure.

The great tunnel was widening, now, into a lofty room. Here white-clad Atlanteans were handing out curious contrivances of metal and glass, not unlike the radio sets of the upper world, which the heterogeneous crowd of fighting men were strapping upon their backs.

"So!" Falworth wriggled the queer pack into place between his shoulders. "This will do for the two of us! Haste, man, else we arrive too late!"

Dazed by the strangeness of it all, Don followed his guide toward a huge brass door set in one side of the room. As they approached, it swung ponderously open, revealing a dark, damp-walled chamber. At once, a score of warriors sprang forward, filling the great lock, among them Don and Humphrey. Hardly had they entered when the door began to close behind them.

"Stay close!" Humphrey warned, adjusting a lever of the pack on his shoulders. Suddenly from the strange device an aura of light burst forth, surrounding them. The other men of Thyllos also touched switches, were surrounded by glowing globes of light.

All at once the outer door of the immense lock swung open. Water, from the sea beyond, spouted through the opening. Instinctively, Don started, but the slender Englishman laughed.

"Have no fear!" he exclaimed. "The water cannot touch us! These packs upon our backs surround us with spheres of force, shield us just as the island itself is shielded!"

Peering through the walls of the strange

sphere, Don watched the water surge about them. A raging torrent, it swept into the lock; yet surrounding him and Humphrey, as surrounded the others, was a glowing globe of force, some ten feet in diameter . . . a bubble of air which remained the same no matter how they moved!

The warriors of Thyllos were crowding through the entrance out onto the ocean's bottom, now. Humphrey Falworth, Don at his side, stepped through to join them. The scene was one which lingered long in Don's memory. The sea-floor, white sand, above which long tendrils of kelp waved . . . the strange luminous fish darting back and forth . . . the great globes of force, glowing gold, through the walls of which were visible huge Vikings, stalwart Grecians, swarthy Incas, ponderous crusaders, their faces lit by the excitement of battle.

Suddenly, as his eyes became accustomed to the queer light, Don could make out other globes, like phosphorescent pearls, shining through the forests of sea-weed.

"The Karsisians!" Humphrey exclaimed, drawing his highly-charged rapier. "Saint George for England!"

Swiftly he plunged toward the nearest of the strange spheres; through its walls Don could see a stocky, black-bearded man, clad in picturesque boots, red sash, ragged breeches and shirt. In his hand he held a heavy cutlass.

AS HUMPHREY moved forward, the man of Karsis did likewise. At once the two globes of force merged, blended into one ovoid bubble, some fifteen feet in length. Sword in hand, Humphrey sprang toward his antagonist.

The man of Karsis spat an oath in sibilant Spanish, aimed a murderous stroke at the Englishman's head.

"Nay, master blackbeard!" Humphrey *laughed*, deftly turning the blow to the accompaniment of blue electrical sparks. "Needs must employ more skill than that!"

He lunged swiftly, a thrust which his opponent barely parried. A smell of ozone filled the bubble as lightning-like arcs leaped between the two highly-charged blades . . . blades the lightest touch of which meant death.

Suddenly, with a feint that lowered Falworth's guard, the Karsisian stepped in with a swinging stroke, all the force of his knotted muscles behind it. In vain, Humphrey tried to guard himself; steel rang on steel and the light rapier flew from the Englishman's hand. With a shout of triumph the black-bearded man stepped forward to touch and electrify his disarmed adversary.

In that instant Don Harper acted. Snatching his automatic from its holster, he drew a quick bead on the Karsisian's chest, fired.

The roar, in that small space, was like the sound of a cannon. For just a moment the black-bearded man stood erect, shock-sword lifted. Then, eyes glazed, he pitched forward on his face.

"Thanks," Humphrey said coolly, retrieving his rapier. "It has been many years since I smelt gunpowder. Upon these islands, alas, no chemicals are to be found for its manufacture. Yours, indeed, is a strange weapon. I see no flint, no match. You must explain it to me when we have more leisure."

Humphrey turned, headed into the thick of the battle, leaving the dead Karsisian, still surrounded by his bubble of air, lying upon the sand. Keeping always at his companion's side, Don glanced at the strange struggle raging about them. Two of the globes, rushing toward each other, would merge, while the opponents fought, then separate as the victor passed on. Once Don saw an immense bubble in the center of which Sven, a berserk smile on his lips, fought back three of the assailants. More and more men were issuing from the air-lock of the island, and the savage Kar-

sisians were beginning to disappear in flight among the forest of kelp.

"They give way!" Humphrey cried exultantly. "See, they run!"

He raced forward, overtaking a swarthy figure in cuirass and helmet. As their globes blended, the dark man whirled, cross-bow in hand. With a twang, the heavy bolt left the bow, shot past Humphrey's head, then abruptly stopped as it encountered the wall of force. Don fumbled for his gun again, but before he could fire, the slim Englishman had slain his opponent with a touch of his deadly, highly-charged weapon.

"So." Falworth watched the enemy globes disappear into the dark stretches of water. "Marry, how they flee! See, already Sven has given the signal for our return to Thylos!"

Don peered through the golden globe. Triumphant, the strange assortment of warriors were falling back toward the air-lock, bearing their dead and wounded.

"But," he exclaimed, "why retreat now? If you were to follow them, you might be able to wipe out the rest of the raiding party!"

"Nay." Falworth brushed back his curly hair. "We fight in defense only. The law of Atlantis prohibits needless slaughter. Ah, here comes Sven!" He waved, and a moment later another golden bubble blended with theirs. The big Viking, a deep burn across his chest, joined them.

"By Odin!" he boomed. "A fight fit for the gods! Three of them fell upon me, one giving me this scratch ere I cut him down!"

"But" . . . Don demanded . . . "who are these Karsisians? Where do they come from?"

"Eh?" Humphrey Falworth broke into a laugh. "Faith, that's droll! Our friend here fights valiantly, saves my life, and all without knowing aught of his foe! Recollect, Master Harper, that there were two islands, two hilltops, saved by the Atlantean

black arts. For years they dwelt happily, visiting, exchanging lore and science. Then one fine day a shipload of freebooters, rovers of the Main, were cast upon the Isle of Karsis. As scurvy a crew of knaves as ever sailed the sea, they repaid their hosts' hospitality by overrunning the island, making the Atlanteans slaves, and mistreating their women-folk. And since the energy shields about the islands are of different frequency from those of these smaller globes, one cannot enter them as we enter each other's globe. Each island is secure behind its invisible walls so that only by raids and skirmishes like this do we meet."

"And you make no attempts to free the Atlanteans in Karsis?" Don asked.

"Nay," Sven growled. "Long have I thought the same, but Ahu and the others are men of peace, opposed to needless fighting. So the matter stands."

The great air-lock loomed before them now, and a moment later they had entered it. Pumps emptied the lock of water, enabling them to snap off the energy packs upon their shoulders as they stepped through. Following the ranks of victorious warriors, they re-entered the city.

Thylos was a scene of triumph. A babble of voices in a score of languages were lifted in shouts, songs. In the shadow of the cyclopean buildings, the defenders bandaged wounds, reenacted their parts in the struggle. Here a Napoleonic grenadier sheathed his deadly bayonet, here a tattooed sailor downed a mug of ale, here groups of dark Carthaginians made offering before a wayside shrine. A brilliant spectacle, these many fighting men, all decked in the panoply of war!

From the immense temple of Poseidon in the center of the city came a solemn chant as the Atlanteans bewailed those whose immortal lives had been ended in battle. In a little group before one of the massive columns, Don made out Anne, her father, old Ahu, and the aviator, *Varhely*. Sven

and Humphrey at his side, he made his way toward them.

"Ah! Anne ran forward to meet them. "All safe? Nay, but you are wounded, Sven!"

"A scratch." The Norseman shook his head contemptuously. "Ours has been a great victory!"

"A victory, yes?" Old Ahu inclined his silver head. "Yet it brings me much unhappiness. Know that before the men of Karsis attacked, someone slew both the guards of the locks! Someone within the city, since the guards were stationed on the inside! Had another minute elapsed before the alarm was spread, this traitor might have opened the locks, admitted the men of Karsis!"

Don's eyes lit up at the old Atlantean's words. The cloaked man, the murderer of McKane, had been signaling to someone beyond the dome when they had interrupted him. Undoubtedly this was the man who had killed the guards of the lock. And that man had murdered the little radio operator with an electric sword, the handle of which was shaped like a silver porpoise. . . .

"Ahu! Captain Ross!" he exclaimed. "I think I can identify the man responsible for all this! He can be recognized by . . ."

"Wait!" Old Ahu glanced warningly at the crowds of people nearby. "Your man, or a follower of his, may be within earshot. Go at once to the garden of the gods, wait there until I find the other members of the Council and join you! Let the warrior Sven go, too, to see that no harm befalls you on the way."

CHAPTER V

SEARCH FOR THE TRAITOR

THE garden of the gods, high on the slopes above the city, was as close to paradise, Don thought, as could be attained by man. Flowers of every

description from purple orchids to unknown blossoms of varied hue were banked in rich profusion, filling the air with heady perfume. Queer yellow trees, like growing gold, and a network of rainbow-tinted vines made shady bowers, while baroque statues, graceful marble shrines, singing fountains, gave a man-made touch to this breath-taking wonderland. Stranger than anything else was the sight of the cool green sea, above, and on all sides of the hilltop, illuminated by the soft light from within the vast dome of force.

"Of all Thyllos," Captain Ross' ruddy face broke into a smile, "this place is the most beautiful, the most sacred. Once, at the battle of Saratoga back in America, I was wounded, given up for dead, and, thinking my last hour come, dreamed of a heaven like this. Again, when the 'Yorktown' foundered, I had the same thought."

"And," Anne broke in, laughing, "when we regained consciousness in this garden, we believed it, indeed, Heaven, and the Atlanteans, in their white robes, seraphs!"

Don smiled, glanced about once more. Behind him stood Sven, leaning pensively upon his huge sword. And beside him was Captain Ross, Anne, in colonial garb. . . . In spite of the grim actuality of the recent undersea fight, Don found it hard to shake off the feeling of unreality that gripped him. Atlantis . . . men and women of every age, living, immortal, beneath the sea. . . .

A crackling in the underbrush aroused him. Perhaps Ahu, the other members of the council were arriving. . . . Suddenly the calm of the garden was broken by a queer twanging noise and something dark, slender, shot by him. Then big Sven swayed, his face all at once blank, fell to the ground. A copper arrow, sputtering its lethal blue electrical emanations, projected from his arm!

"Damme!" Captain Ross leaped back, drawing his light sword. "What devil's work is this?"

Before he could reach Sven's side there was a second ominous twang.

"Don!" Anne's voice rose in shrill warning.

Automatically, Don leaped to one side. As he did so, another highly-charged arrow shot by him, stood quivering in the bole of a tree!

"He's here!" Captain Ross shouted, rushing forward. "In these bushes!"

No sooner had he reached the clump of scarlet shrubbery, however, than a tall spare figure, muffled in a dark cloak, sprang from this place of concealment. As the Captain sprang toward him, he drew back the heavy cross-bow he carried, hurled it straight at Ross! In vain, the Captain tried to dodge; the weapon crashed against his temple, sent him, unconscious, to the ground.

In this split second, Don had recognized the cloaked figure . . . recognized it as the same which had killed McKane. A fierce smile on his lean bronzed face, he jerked the heavy automatic from its holster, fired.

A thunderous roar disturbed the peace of the sweet-scented gardens. The masked man did not pause in his plunge toward Don. The American swore; in his haste the shot had gone wide. A sword was glittering in his assailant's hand . . . an electric sword with a silver handle shaped like a porpoise! Just as Don was about to fire a second time, the blade licked out in a deadly thrust. No half charge, this time, he realized. One touch of the sputtering blue piece of steel would bring instant death. Leaping backwards, he squeezed the trigger of the automatic.

Again the bullet missed its mark . . . but by some queer twist of fate it struck the gleaming shock-sword! The length of steel flew into a dozen fragments, blackening the grass as they fell!

With a bellow of rage, the mysterious marauder hurled the heavy silver hilt at Don; then, as the American ducked, dove

into the masses of shrubbery. Gun in hand, Harper plunged after him. Familiar with every path, every clump of bushes, the masked man wove in and out of the maze of undergrowth, disappeared in a grove of gnarled, purple-blossomed trees. In vain Don pursued him; his assailant seemed to have vanished into the earth. For some moments, the American searched for the murderer, then, realizing the futility of his endeavors, headed back to the clearing.

HE REACHED the scene of the struggle in time to see Captain Ross, supported by a white-faced, tragic-eyed Anne, lurch to his feet. The Captain's countenance was a blue-black mass of bruises. Sven lay still, a trickle of blood seeping from his arm. One glance told Don that the highly-charged copper arrow had done its grim work . . . the bluff, big-hearted Viking had gone to join his companions in Valhalla.

Suddenly anxious shouts resounded through the garden. Varhely ran toward them.

"What is it?" he cried. "I heard shots . . ."

Before Don could explain, there were more cries of alarm and Humphrey, Ahu, the other members of the Council, burst into the clearing.

"Mighty Poseidon!" Old Ahu quavered. "Death . . . in the garden of the gods!"

In tense, emotion-packed words, Captain Ross gasped out the story of the savage attack.

"Again the traitor in our midst!" Humphrey exclaimed. "Twice murder in cold blood . . . and the slaying of the guards of the locks! Poor Sven! For over a hundred years have he and I . . ." The Englishman broke off, his eyes tortured.

"Aye," Captain Ross muttered. "A true and brave friend, for all his barbarous manner!" He turned to Don. "You claimed that you could identify this traitor! How?"

Harper shook a sombre head.

"Before this attack, I had a means of identifying him," he said. "Maybe he overheard me, jumped us in hopes of getting me out of the way. But now, whether he knows it or not, he's safe." Don picked up the silver hilt of their assailant's sword. "I noticed that the shock-stick which killed McKane had a handle of silver in the shape of a porpoise, hoped to find the man who wore it. But now . . ."

Old Ahu studied the curiously-carved handle which concealed the tiny battery giving the sword its lethal charge.

"It is familiar to me," he muttered. "Often have I seen such a sword. But who wore it, I cannot remember." Ahu thrust the hilt into his belt. "Before the gods, I swear the killer shall not escape us! None shall be permitted to pass through the locks until the entire island has been searched! Sooner or later we shall find him! And when that day comes, the traitor shall pay the penalty of the law of Knem!"

CHAPTER VI

THE TRAITOR EXPOSED

THE great pyramid-temple of Poseidon rose high above the white marble city below, dominating it like some hoary giant. Don Harper, standing motionless on the summit of the massive structure, gazed with brooding eyes at the crowded colorful streets of the city. Somewhere in those throngs of gayly dressed men and women was the mysterious assailant who had killed McKane, Sven, the guards of the lock . . . and attempted to murder him, Don, fearing discovery. Did the intruder in this submarine paradise know that the means of identification was now all but useless? Or would there be, Don reflected, other attempts upon his life?

"You are thoughtful, sir!" Anne Ross, crossing the marble-paved terrace, laughed. "Does the beauty of our city fail to please you?"

"No." He shook his head. "I've never seen anything quite so lovely." Don's eyes, as he spoke, however, were not upon the panorama beneath them. He was gazing at the girl, slim, vivid, delicate as a bit of old dresden.

"I vow you'll make me vain, sir!" she laughed, coloring. "I had a treat planned for you, Mr. Harper, yet I fear that one so bold . . ."

"Okey," he chuckled. "I'll be good. Remember, I'm not used to eighteenth century manners! What's the treat?"

"This!" She exhibited a bit of papyrus, covered with hieroglyphs. "Although none are permitted to leave the locks until the spy is found, Ahu has given me a pass permitting us to go beyond the dome, visit the marine gardens. Neither you nor I, nor Humphrey, could, of course, be the traitor."

"Humphrey?" Don asked. "Is he included?"

"To be sure!" Anne Ross said. "'Twould not be seemly to venture abroad with you alone! He is to meet us at the entrance of the lock. Shall we go?"

At the entrance of the great tunnel-like locks, however, they found instead of Humphrey the lean, dark aviator, Varhely. A large wicker basket hung from his hand.

"Hello!" he grinned. "Falworth sends his regrets. Ahu has made him leader of one of the parties searching for the Karsisian spy. He asked me to take his place. And to show that my heart's in the right place, I brought a basket of lunch." Varhely turned to Don. "All set for a fish's-eye view of the ocean?"

"I had a look at it yesterday, during the battle," Don said shortly.

"Lucky man! By the time I got to this lock it was all over." Smiling, he took Anne's arm, nodding cheerfully at the guards as she exhibited Ahu's slip of papyrus. The two tall Altanteans who stood at either side of the tunnel examined it, waved them through.

DON was silent as they walked along the huge, stone-lined tube. He found it strange that Humphrey had been so suddenly appointed to one of the searching parties. It seemed even more strange that he should have asked Varhely to take his place, since the latter was no more than a nodding acquaintance of the Englishman's. Still, perhaps Humphrey had thought that the aviator, being of the same era as he, Don, might prove a more suitable companion for this undersea excursion . . . Troubled, Harper followed Anne and Varhely into the large room upon which the locks proper opened.

Beside the mass of levers and switches that operated the locks stood the venerable Atlantean attendant. At sight of Anne's pass, he handed them three of the portable energy packs. Varhely slipped one of them upon his own shoulders, turned to Don.

"Here!" He said. "I'll show you how it works! The thing's simplicity itself! You just . . ." The sentence was concluded by a swinging, crashing blow of his knotted fist. Caught completely by surprise, Don swayed, dropping the heavy pack. Dimly he heard Anne scream, saw the old lock tender start up in surprise. Then, as Varhely's fist jolted against his jaw a second time, he crumpled to the floor, unconscious.

Don Harper recovered his senses to find himself lying upon the stone floor of the lock room. His arms and legs were securely bound by strips of cloth torn from his own shirt. Anne, also bound, lay near him, while the old lock-tender sprawled over his desk, blood streaming from an ugly wound in his head. Varhely, his face set in a saturnine smile, bent over the array of levers on the control panel. As Don stirred, he swung around, saluted him mockingly.

"Awake, Mr. Harper?" he murmured. "Excellent! You will be able then to witness my escape, and, more dramatic still, the destruction of Thyllos. Unfortunately, you will miss the greatest triumph of all . . . the

conquest of the upper world by the Eurasian Alliance!"

"The Eurasian Alliance!" Don exclaimed. "Then you . . ."

"I am a commander in its air-force. While on a scouting expedition some months ago, I ran into a bit of anti-aircraft fire from one of the cruisers of your Atlantic squadron. My gas tanks punctured, I seemed doomed to a watery grave when I spotted this strange island. My plane got me to within a half-mile of it and I swam the remaining distance."

"And repay our kindness," Anne cried contemptuously, "by spying for Karsis!"

"Only through necessity," Varhely replied easily, hard at work on the row of levers. "As soon as I learned that these Atlanteans possessed both the secret of immortality, and that of anti-gravity, I realized that we of the Alliance could easily conquer the earth, live as immortals, dominating the common herd. Surely a tremendous reward for any risks I might take!"

"You're mad!" Don grated. "The upper world could not survive if immortality were introduced. Overpopulation, famine, the death of religion, no future . . . it's impossible! And anti-gravity might enable you to conquer the world, but you'd never get the Atlanteans to reveal it!"

"Wishful thinking, Mr. Harper." Varhely went on with his work, chuckling. "The Atlanteans here might not, but you forget Karsis. Its buccaneer rulers have, in their own inimitable fashion, wormed the secret from the Atlanteans whom they made slaves. A week after I had reached Thyllos, I went out in one of these globes of force, headed for Karsis. Upon my promise to see that they entered this island, Gismond, the chief of Karsis, explained to me a portion of the anti-gravity secret. Fascinating, Mr. Harper! Just as cutting an electromagnetic field produces a flow of electrons, or electricity, so the cutting of a gravitational field produces a flow of protons, or electrogravitational force! The mass of sea-

water above us acts as one 'magnet,' the earth below as the other, while the armature which cuts the lines of force between them, instead of being wrapped with copper wire, is circled by tubes of hydrogen! That's just the barest outline, of course. The detailed explanation was to have been mine when the Karsisians entered this lock, captured Thylos."

"And you failed!" Anne laughed mockingly. "Even by killing the guards you were not able to admit the Karsisians! Is it likely they'll give the secret of gravity generation to you after you have failed?"

"True." Varhely nodded. "Our first attempt was not a success. In a very few minutes, however, Thylos shall be destroyed! First I pass through the lock, wearing an energy pack, make my way to safety. As I leave, I shall wedge open the outer door, which will leave only this inner door to prevent the water from pouring into the island, under pressure of a ton to the square inch, and destroying all within the dome. The problem of opening this inner door after I have gone is simple. You will, I am sure, appreciate my ingenuity."

EYES wide with horror, Anne and Don watched Varhely open the wicker "lunch-basket," take from it a large clay vessel filled with water. This he hung by a bit of cord from the ceiling. A similar vessel, but empty, he hung from one of the switches on the control panel, immediately below the upper, water-filled jug.

"Observe." The spy rubbed his hands in anticipation. "Immediately before leaving, I remove this plug in the upper container. Water begins to drip into the lower one. When enough water has entered the lower vessel to give it sufficient weight, it pulls the switch down, thus opening the inner door of the lock and admitting the sea. Within a half-hour the entire island of Thylos will be destroyed! And when Gismond, the other Karsisians, learn that I have brought them victory, they will give

me the secret of anti-gravity, raise Karsis to the surface! A raft will carry me to the Canaries where our fleet assembles. Think, Mr. Harper!—the secret of gravity in the hands of the Eurasian Alliance! America, the whole world shall be ours!"

"No!" Anne whispered. "You can't! Dad . . . Ahu . . . Humphrey . . . you can't drown them! To wipe out the entire island . . .!"

"Not the entire island!" Varhely's black eyes glittered ironically. "You will come with me to the upper world, witness the conquest of our Alliance!" He pulled the switch opening the inner door of the lock, then removed the plug from the vessel of water. Carrying the struggling girl, he moved toward the entrance.

"Anne!" Don, his face white, surged forward, fighting the bonds that held him against the wall.

Varhely had entered the lock, now, and a touch of the lever on his energy pack surrounded both him and the girl with a globe of glowing force. Drawing the huge inner door shut, he smiled mockingly at Don. His lips framed a derisive farewell and an instant later the inner door clicked shut.

Stunned, Don stared at the control panel. The moment the door closed, the switch had snapped shut. Now, drop by drop, water from the upper vessel was dripping into the lower. And as soon as the weight was sufficient, the switch would be dragged down again, opening the door—a deluge, shooting under tremendous pressure through the lock, to destroy the grandeur of Atlantis!

Frantically the American writhed, twisted, exerted every ounce of strength to break his bonds. Lashed against a huge pipe that ran along the wall, there was no chance of even bumping against the jug, upsetting it. Face beaded with sweat, muscles aching, Don struggled against the improvised rope.

Slowly, like poison dropping into a cup, the water trickled through the hole in the upper vessel. Don shouted vainly for help,

but his voice was smothered by the masses of mighty masonry. Long minutes passed and still he could make no impression on the bonds that held him motionless.

The lower jug was half full; the cord by which it was fastened to the release switch grew dangerously taut. The steady drip of the falling water was maddening. To Don, still dazed from Varhely's blows, it seemed that the sound was like the booming of a mighty drum, cruelly unvarying . . . a drum of doom! Drip . . . drip . . . drip . . . Now it was like the pounding of an inexorable heart . . . now it was a merciless hammer thudding against his taut nerves. Drip . . . drip . . . drip . . .

The receiver was three-quarters full! The weight upon the handle of the switch had drawn it a fraction of an inch from the wall! Another drop into the container and another imperceptible movement of the lever. Terrifying pictures flashed through Don's mind. Thylos engulfed, its heterogeneous population doomed, even as the inhabitants of Atlantis had been doomed! The great buildings, the vast store of knowledge, accumulated over untold centuries, would be lost forever!—the breath-taking beauty of the garden of the gods, the temple of Poseidon, the white marble city . . . all buried beneath mud and sand!

Suddenly, as the switch creaked ominously, Don threw all his remaining strength into one tremendous effort. Something gave and his right hand, numb and blue, slipped loose!

Desperately Don reached around to pick at the knots which held him to the wall . . . then realized that it was too late. Long minutes must pass before he could free himself, cross the room, empty the lower vessel . . . and three more drops would give sufficient weight to pull the switch!

Eyes bleak with despair, Don watched one of the three drops fall. All at once his numb fingers encountered his automatic, overlooked by the spy. Frantically he

snatched it from its holster, just as the second drop fell. Eyes blinded with sweat, hand trembling, Don raised the gun, fired!

The roar in the closed room was terrific. As the puff of smoke cleared away, Don's heart leaped. The jug was shattered into a dozen fragments, its load of water spilled upon the floor! Only a length of limp cord hung from the handle of the switch! Thylos was saved!

At that moment, as Don sagged panting, exhausted, against his bonds, the lock-tender stirred, aroused by the sound of the shot. His head caked with dried blood the old man dragged himself erect, gazed wild-eyed at the scene before him.

"Help me get loose!" Don exclaimed. "Captain Ross' daughter . . . carried off by that murderer . . .!" While the lock-tender cut his bonds, he snapped out the story of Varhely's attempt to destroy the isle.

"Mighty Poseidon!" The old man glanced in horror at the shattered jug. "Surely the gods have saved us!" He tottered toward the tunnel. "I must tell the guards . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Don seized his arm. "Isn't there some other lock leading to the sea? To open this one is death to us all . . . but unless I can get free at once, overtake Varhely before he reaches Karsis, there's no chance of saving Anne! There must be some other way from this island!"

"Aye." The old man muttered. "There lies the emergency lock, to be used in case of danger to the large one!" He pointed to a small doorway lost in the shadows at the end of the room. "Yet it might be wise for you to wait until the others are notified . . ."

"And let Varhely get an impossible lead on us?" Don slipped into his energy pack, headed for the small lock. "Quick!"

The old tender turned to the control panel; a moment later Don, shielded by his globe of force, had passed through the little emergency lock into the dark, mysterious undersea world beyond.

CHAPTER VII
SAVAGE ASSAILANTS

THE ocean depths were a shimmering cool green in the light from the immense golden dome of Thyllos. Before Don lay great fields of kelp, peopled by darting fish of every size and description, from tiny sea-devils with luminous teeth, to exquisite butterfly-fish. Now and then a great black monster would swirl inquisitively toward the globe of lambent energy about him, then, checked, wheel off and disappear. For some moments after emerging from the lock Don stood still, waiting for his eyes to grow accustomed to the weird light.

The ocean floor, contrary to his expectations, was far from level. A long slope lay before him, its surface cut with sudden hollows, great moss-covered boulders. After ten minutes' walking Thyllos had disappeared behind a series of mounds, with only a vague glow to mark its location. Now Don could see but a few yards on all sides before the illumination from his globe died away in the eternal darkness of the sea bottom. He paid scant heed to his surroundings, however, plunging grimly in the direction of Karsis.

Suddenly from the crest of a small rise Don saw something that made his heart leap. Far ahead a round bubble of light moved along the ocean's floor! Too large to be a luminous fish, it was unquestionably an energy globe! Loosening the pistol in its holster, Don raced toward the sphere of light.

Now the other globe had, apparently, seen him, for its occupant increased his pace. In spite of this, the distance between the two rapidly diminished; burdened by the girl's weight, Varhely could make little speed. Onward across the interminable stretches of sand and slime the globes sped, forcing their way through tangles of seaweed, circling huge rocks, leaping rocky fissures.

Don could make out two figures behind the other energy shield . . . Varhely, red-faced, panting . . . Anne, very pale, stumbling along at his side, casting an anxious glance from time to time over her shoulder. Now only a hundred yards separated the two globes. Exultant, Don increased his speed. Fifty yards . . . twenty-five . . . Varhely was gasping for breath, swaying, as he tried to drag the girl onward. Don grinned, gripping the automatic. In another moment the globes would blend, and then . . .

All at once Don saw an expression of horror pass over Anne's countenance, saw a soundless scream rise to her lips. Varhely paused, grinning, stared at the water above the pursuing sphere. Automatically Don's eyes turned upward . . . and the blood leaped in his veins.

Settling about his globe of force was a nightmare creature, the sight of which brought cold sweat to his brow. Huge python-like tentacles, fully twenty feet long wove a writhing network about the shimmering sphere while a huge shapeless mass, leprous white, sank slowly, relentlessly, downward. Don could make out great bottomless eyes, cold, unblinking, a cruel curved parrot-like beak, flaccid lips working with a nauseous, avid movement. A giant octopus, monstrous apparition of the unknown depths, held the globe of force in its terrible grip!

For a moment sheer terror shook Don, then he realized that the shield of force, able to hold back the tremendous pressure of the water, was proof against any denizens of the deep. Contemptuously he started forward . . . only to find the globe would not move!

FROWNING, Don glanced at the huge tentacles wrapped about the globe; the octopus was holding him, force screen and all, helpless in its twining arms! As he watched, the immense creature commenced its attack upon the golden globe. Again

and again his curving beak struck at the invisible shield, to no avail. Finding himself thus thwarted, a red haze of rage clouded the monster's eyes; exerting his herculean strength, he shook the globe as though it were a toy balloon. Don, tumbling drunkenly about within it, gasped frantically for breath. There was nothing for him to hold on to; the walls of the globe were somehow intangible.

The water about them was boiling as the huge creature thrashed about in vain assaults at this strange antagonist. Battered, breathless, Don swore in helpless rage. The globe that shielded him also prevented his reaching the raging monster. Curious sputterings were emanating from the energy pack on his shoulders. What if this violent shaking should damage its delicate mechanism?

The globe containing Varhely and Anne had disappeared. Don could see nothing except the cup-studded tentacles, the huge formless face peering down at him. The sputtering of the energy pack had increased, and it seemed that the golden light wavered. The giant octopus, as though aware of this weakness of the shield of force, redoubled his efforts, shaking the globe as a cat shakes a mouse. Desperately, Don attempted to remain on his feet, to save the shoulder pack from further damage. His efforts were to no avail. In another moment . . .

Suddenly Don saw the octopus' great glassy eyes roll upward. Sleek, savage shapes were darting toward the scene of the conflict. Tiger sharks, a dozen of them, each fifteen or more feet long! Whirling, the octopus dropped the glowing sphere, faced these new antagonists. The sharks, their fierce teeth bared, fell like wolves upon the huge monster.

Crouching, out of breath, within the sphere, Don watched this titanic battle of the deep. One of the sharks was in the grip of the tentacles, crushed to a bloody pulp, but the others continued to flash in and out,

lightning fast, their teeth tearing ribbons of white flesh from their monstrous adversary. Blood stained the water, and scores of smaller fish, attracted by it, circled the antagonists like a swarm of vultures. Suddenly a black cloud shot from the octopus, blackening the water, blotting the entire scene from view.

As the sable pall spread through the water, Don shook the cobwebs from his brain, headed away from the furious conflict. At length clear green water greeted his eyes. Nowhere, however, was there any sign of the energy globe containing Varhely and Anne. Taking his bearings from a curiously-shaped rock, he set out once more in the direction of Karsis.

For long hours, Don plodded along the ocean's floor. Great boulders, huge jumbles of carved stone loomed on all sides, grim ruins of some Atlantean city. Don could see the water-worn skeletons of once-mighty buildings, shrouded in funeral palls of sombre sea-weed. Desolate, ghostly, the submerged dwellings were like rows of ancient sepulchres.

Onward past the mouldering ruins Don toiled. The pack on his back was still sputtering ominously and the glowing globe had shrunk until its diameter was hardly six feet. Moreover, the air within it was rapidly growing foul.

A mile past the sunken city, great flats covered with curious growths met Don's gaze. Seaweed, moss, kelp, ranged in rows, separating great masses of brilliant under-sea vegetation, as colorful and ordered as that of some terrestrial hot-house — the marine gardens, Don realized bitterly, that he and Anne had set out so gayly to see hours before. It seemed as though centuries had passed since they left the temple of Poseidon for the locks.

Wearily, his head aching from the foul air, Don staggered on. Long ago his sense of direction had left him; whether he was

heading for Thylos or Karsis, he could not tell. Driven on by some blind instinct, he forced his leaden legs to move, hoping against hope. Anne . . . Varhely . . . he had to overtake them! Had to! If Varhely reached Karsis, obtained the secret of the gravity machines from its rulers, America was doomed! With anti-gravity, fleets of warships could be wafted through the air as easily as planes, could shell cities from above while laughing at the efforts of American aircraft to penetrate their armored hulls! Weird delirious pictures flickered through Don's brain . . . mad pictures of huge battleships floating serenely above New York, hovering in the air as they dumped loads of bombs onto the helpless city! Feverishly Don plodded onward, half-conscious, a prey to wild fantasies.

All at once, the exhausted American saw lights ahead . . . dozens of lights flickering like a swarm of submarine fireflies. Nearer and nearer they came, from all sides, surrounding him. Were they men of Thylos, he wondered, or a patrol from Karsis? Gun in hand, he waited as the golden spheres swept through the water toward him.

The strange globes were near, now; staring at them Don's heart sank. The faces behind the shields of force were brutish, savage, the scarred and bearded features of the pirate conquerors of Karsis! Swiftly Don glanced about. No chance of escape . . . he was surrounded! An examination of the automatic revealed four of its eight shells left in the clip. Four shots . . . and more than twenty of the enemy! Hopelessly Don crouched beneath his shrinking sphere of force.

In an instant, the savage assailants were upon him. A dozen globes merged with his own to make a huge irregularly-shaped bubble of air. Twenty of the grim Karsisians, their electric swords spitting blue sparks, plunged toward their prey, shouting exultantly.

Once Don's heavy pistol roared, and the foremost of his attackers crumpled, clawing at his chest. Again and again, he fired, and two more fell. Howling with rage, the others pressed on. Don planted his last bullet in the body of a huge, black-bearded ruffian wearing a rusty hauberk, then hurled the empty gun at a halbardier who lunged at him with a long, heavy axe.

Even as the halbardier toppled forward, another of the Karsisians drew back his arm, clutching a knife. In vain Don ducked; the blade of the dagger grazed his shoulder with a sputter of blue sparks. Electrical current, unbelievably powerful, swept through his body, stiffening him where he stood. Then, as the dagger passed by, he collapsed weakly, paralyzed by the awful flow of energy. Swords raised, the remaining Karsisians sprang forward.

CHAPTER VIII

ELECTRIC SWORDPLAY

L YING there on the ocean floor, Don watched the electric swords, spitting blue sparks, descend. This it seemed, was the end . . . the end not only for himself, but for America as well. Varhely . . . the secret of anti-gravity . . . In an instant the deadly swords would strike . . .

Suddenly the leader of the raiding party roared an order, struck up the descending weapons.

"Wait!" he growled. "The rogue may have information! Varhely claims to have opened the locks of Thylos, destroyed it. Perhaps by questioning this man we may learn the truth!"

Obediently two of the Karsisians picked up Don and, energy globes merged into one long bubble, set out toward their home-city, followed by the others of the patrol. They had gone only a short distance when the glow of a great dome was visible through

the dark water. Karsis, outwardly a twin to the Isle of Thyllos, lay before them.

Through locks, they passed, emerging in the heart of a huge island city. Don, recovered from the numbing electric shock, was jerked to his feet, bound. Dazedly he glanced about, taking in his surroundings.

Like Thyllos, Karsis was a cyclopean upheaval of stone, a majestic array of great temples, lofty terraces, imposing public buildings, all adorned with magnificent frescoes, brilliant murals, and colossal statues of gods and demi-gods, their expressions grave, their sightless eyes seeming to brood on the mysteries of infinite time and space. Yet while its mighty works remained intact, aloof, the mark of the savage, brutal conquerors of Karsis was everywhere noticeable, desecrating the glory of Atlantis. Temples were being used as taverns, filth and deliberate destruction marred the beauty of the wide streets, gardens and orchards were lost in weeds, the homes of Atlantean nobles robbed of their simple splendor and decked in garish trappings. Yet shocking as this profanation was, it failed to destroy the grandeur of the conquered city. The great shrines, the sublime statues, seemed somehow contemptuous of the efforts of puny man to efface their eternal, ageless majesty.

URGED forward by his captors, Don stumbled along the marble-paved streets. On all sides roaring, drunken throngs met his gaze. Coarse-faced buccaneers, mugs of wine in their hands, roared the ribald choruses of some ancient drinking song; slim, near-nude Atlantean dancing girls waited upon their captors, fierce hatred lurking behind their forced smiles; nobles and haughty priests of Atlantis, emaciated, clad in slaves' rags, toiled in granaries, wine-presses, smithies, enduring the lashes of their overseers with proud stoicism.

All this Don took in as his guards led him along the crowded highways toward a

vast pyramidal building not unlike the temple of Poseidon at Thyllos. A moment later they had passed through its massive portals, were walking along gloomy corridors, on the walls of which were weird bas-reliefs, the figures of long-dead kings of Atlantis. Grey granite ghosts, they marched in endless procession, some all but obliterated by age and neglect, some, better preserved, peering with blind eyes from the dark stone.

At the end of the corridor a truculent sentry halted Don's captors.

"Gismond confers with Varhely, but now arrived from Thyllos," he grunted. "They are not to be disturbed . . ."

"Tell them we bring a prisoner who may supply information," the leader of the patrol snapped. "They'll see us!"

For a moment, the sentinel hesitated. Through the heavy tapestry that blocked the doorway, a dry musty voice was audible.

". . . if, as you claim, Thyllos is inundated, we have only to raise it, rid it of those drowned, and take possession. By such a stroke you will have earned your price . . . the secret of gravity!"

"You have the formulae, the plans?" It was Varhely, speaking in eager tones. "I've lived up to my end of the bargain, and the sooner I reach the surface the better. The war . . ."

Don heard the sentry interrupting, then the dry voice once more. A moment later the curtain was drawn back and they were waved into the room beyond. Seated at one end of the chamber was a lean vulpine man, his hairless head gleaming like old parchment, his sharp features like those of some bird of prey. The mantle he wore, of black velvet, somehow suggested a shroud. Before him stood Varhely, suave and immaculate. At sight of Don, Varhely's face darkened.

"Didn't I tell you to kill the dog when you found him?" he snapped at the leader of the patrol.

"But I thought he might have information," the man protested. Surely . . ."

Gismond, ruler of Karsis, nodded, smiled sardonically.

"You were right," he said. "A chance to test Varhely's story. He seems in great haste for one who, with immortality, has all eternity ahead." Gismond's yellowish eyes turned to Don, fixed him with an unwavering, hypnotic stare. "It will not be well for you to lie when answering my questions, particularly since all information can be verified. Tell me how, with Thylos destroyed by the sea, you were able to escape?"

Don shot a quick glance at Varhely. The spy's face was waxy, contorted with suppressed rage. His plans for obtaining the secret of gravity, of world domination by the Eurasian Alliance, hung in the balance.

"Varhely has lied to you!" Don exclaimed. "Thylos is not destroyed! If you care to send scouts to investigate they'll tell you the same!"

"So?" Gismond's bland gaze swung to the aviator. "What say you this time? Did you indeed believe me fool enough to give you the formulae, return you to the surface, without verifying your story?"

"I . . . there must have been some mistake," Varhely faltered before those yellow, cat-like eyes. "Everything was ready when I left. Someone must have entered the lock-room, freed the controls . . ."

"More lies!" Gismond roared, suddenly ablaze. "Bones of the Saints, fool, I'm sick of your excuses! Your mighty plans for the capture and destruction of Thylos have cost me the lives of sturdy warriors and availed us nothing! First your bungling attempt to admit us into Thylos, now the stupid affair of opening its locks! Perhaps a score of years' labor in the foundries will sharpen your wits!" He turned to the troop of guards. "Take this boaster to the slave quarters . . ."

"Wait!" Varhely sprang forward, seized Gismond's arm. "A . . . A minute! I've a plan! One that's sure to work!"

"Another plan?" Gismond growled. "I've enough of your stupidity! What hair-brained scheme is this?"

"I'll show you!" Varhely turned, whispered to one of the guards. The man nodded, left the room. A moment later he returned, a small erect figure at his side. Chin high, dark eyes glowing, Anne Ross stared in cool white scorn at her captors. Suddenly, catching sight of Don, the girl's composure broke.

"Don!" she whispered. "What . . . what happened? Dad . . . Ahu . . . the city . . ."

"All safe," he replied. "I managed to get free, prevent the lock from opening. Don't worry . . ."

"Silence!" Gismond broke in harshly, his cold gaze sweeping the girl's slender form. "You will be good enough to explain, Master Varhely, what this wench has to do with the ultimate capture of Thylos!"

"Surely." The spy's dark face broke into a smile. "She's the daughter of Captain Ross, a member of Thylos' council. Now it's hardly likely that he'll let the kidnaping of his daughter pass quietly. Thylos is already in a fighting mood after the events of the past few days. This should be the excuse needed to bring them to attack us here."

"Ah!" Gismond nodded. "I think I begin to understand. You mean . . ."

"I mean," Varhely repeated, "that all our attacks have failed because the Atlanteans and their followers remained safe behind the energy walls of Thylos. By this manoeuvre we draw them into the open. An ambush of their forces . . ."

"Excellent!" Gismond cried. "This time you have done well! The submarine gardens lie on their route, and the thick masses of seaweed should well conceal the light of our globes! A thousand men hidden there

could fall upon them, cut them to bits before they recovered from the surprise! I myself shall lead the attack to prevent any of those unfortunāte 'mistakes' that seem to attend your efforts. And if we succeed, you may claim your reward, the formulae of our anti-gravity machines!"

He motioned to the leader of the warriors. "Let the American be placed in confinement. He must have contact with no one, in order that our plans remain secret. The girl will be kept here, under guard. She may prove amusing after we have settled with the men of Thyllos."

At Gismond's words, the coarse-faced soldiers laughed, seized Anne. Sight of the girl's pale, horrified face filled Don with sudden fury. Desperately, he tried to break away from his guards, to throw himself upon the mocking Gismond, but a rain of blows battered him into submission. One glance, he had, of Varhely's saturnine countenance, of Gismond's ironic smile, then the Karsisian warriors dragged him from the room.

CHAPTER IX

THE FATHER OF EVIL

THE prisons of Karsis, located far below the city, were dank, musty with age. Grasping shadows lurked like sombre spectres through the cells, the damp-walled corridors, and a bitter cold emanated from the mighty blocks of basalt of which the dungeon was constructed.

Don Harper, pacing back and forth in his tiny oubliette, was oppressed by the vast antiquity of the place. The ghosts of a hundred long-forgotten civilizations crowded upon his consciousness. Rude hieroglyphs in a score of lost languages covered the walls; the floor was worn to glassy smoothness by a myriad restless feet. In his mind's eye he could see the long procession of weary captives who had cursed these four walls of stone—kings of Mu, perhaps,

their golden robes and turquoise-studded armlets a hollow mockery of their former grandeur . . . lean, ascetic priests of Peru, solemn, majestic men, contemplating the mysteries of the stars, the intricacies of human thought, as they waited in vain for the day when their armies would overthrow the legions of Atlantis, release them . . . great black-bearded warriors of Punt, of Elath, raging in vain against the immutable stone until their mighty thews, their flashing eyes, and fierce spirits had fled, leaving only the grists of men who waited for the inevitable final escape. Rich merchants of Ophir, bedizened courtiers from Knossus, licentious Cimmerian fire-worshipers, barbarians of Thule . . . And now, Don reflected ironically, a lieutenant of the United States Navy, following the same restless pacing footsteps, last in this melancholy procession of the ages!

The jingle of a guard's accoutrements as he made his round of the cells, brought Don back to the present. Frowning, he glanced at the marks he had scratched upon the wall. Two days! More like two centuries! What had occurred during those forty-eight hours? Had the forces of Thyllos fallen into Varhely's trap, been destroyed? Had they decided against an attack on Karsis? Or were they even now marching toward the undersea gardens?

Don shook his head, gripped the bronze bars of the door. If only he could get free, escape Karsis, warn them! More than Thyllos depended upon the outcome of this struggle on the ocean's floor. The success of Varhely's trap meant that he would be given the plans of the great gravity generators, the secret of anti-gravity. And with this ancient lore of Atlantis in the hands of Varhely, America was doomed! Already, with its main fleet engaged in the Pacific, with the huge Eurasian squadron gathering at Teneriffe to attack the helpless eastern seaboard, America seemed faced with in-

evitable defeat. But with the mysterious force of gravity in the possession of the Alliance, there was no hope for the new world. Placed at the disposal of the skilful Eurasian scientists, nothing could stand up against it. Cities uprooted, hurled into the air, planes dragged down, armed forces trapped by invulnerable walls of force like those surrounding the undersea islands. Varhely had said that gravity was a force like magnetism, like electricity, and as easily controlled. In the hands of ruthless aggressors, it would create a holocaust, reduce America to a desert. And unless the men of Thylos were saved from the ambush . . .

Again the footsteps of guards broke the silence of the prison; this time there were four of them, dragging a slim Atlantean youth whose body showed the marks of cruel blows.

"So, knave!" With a taunting laugh the guards shoved him into a neighboring cell. "Impudence toward Gismond's new favorites goes not unrewarded. Here you will remain until Gismond himself returns from his victory over the forces of Thylos. He'll decide on a fitting punishment, I'll warrant!"

DON watched the Atlantean slump to the floor of the cell, the guards disappear in the gloom of the massive corridor. Who had they meant by Gismond's new favorite, he wondered? Could it have been Anne? And why would an Atlantean, like herself a captive, offend the girl? For a moment Don stared at the youth, a limp, inert figure upon the floor; then, as he heard very faintly above him the tramp of marching feet, the roar of a buccaneer's chorus, the matter of the young Atlantean was swept from his mind. Were the marching men above returning, victorious, or were they setting out to take their place in the ambushade? Suddenly, as the tumult died slowly away in the distance, he had his answer. Gismond and his follow-

ers were leaving! Which meant that the battle had yet to occur! If only by some miracle he could escape, warn Ahu, Captain Ross, of the trap . . .

Frantically Don began to examine his cell, but as always, the search proved fruitless. Clammy stone walls, stout bronze bars . . . a pallet of straw, the clay dish which had contained his evening meal . . . these and nothing more. This ancient prison which had resisted all efforts at escape for thousands of years seemed impervious; the great blocks of basalt needed no mortar . . . each one weighed tons . . . and the strange archaic lock was the work of long-dead craftsmen, defying his clumsy efforts at picking it. At length, worn out by worry, Don threw himself upon the heap of straw, fell into a troubled slumber.

It was the clink of metal, the sound of someone calling his name that aroused Don. Drowsily he stirred, then, as the voice called again, sat up. Suddenly he gave a muffled cry of amazement. Before the door of his cell stood the young Atlantean! A slender shadowy figure in the gloom, the youth was bending over the massive bronze lock of the door, his face intent. A curious acrid odor was wafted across the oubliette. Sharply awake now, Don sprang toward the entrance.

"Who . . . who are you?" he exclaimed. "How . . ."

"Speak softly," the Atlantean warned. "And beware the acid! Its touch is death!"

"Acid?" Don muttered, bewildered.

The boy nodded, exhibited the tiny golden vial from which he was dropping a greenish liquid into the lock.

"Soon, now, the mechanism will be eaten away, just as it was in my cell. A few drops suffice, for this is the ancient elixir my forefathers called 'the tears of Poseidon.' Only the purest gold can withstand it."

"But . . . I don't understand." Don stared at the fumes rising from the lock. "How did you get the stuff? And why are you freeing me?"

"I came here for that purpose. And the vial I carried in my mouth, since these swaggering fools do not realize that so potent a force can be carried in so small a space." He unscrewed the cap of the vial; it was, Don noticed, not unlike a crude eye-dropper. Thin and sharp as a needle, a globule of the greenish fluid dangled from its point. When the drop had been introduced into the lock, the Atlantean resumed speaking.

"I am Hatan, once a prince of Karsis, now a page of Gismond's household. The girl, Anne Ross, told me of Gismond's plan to ambush the forces of Thyllos, marching here to free us, and of your imprisonment. At my suggestion she made false complaints of 'insolence' against me, which caused me to be brought here. Thus, using the 'tears of Poseidon' I shall be able to free you. Together we will make our escape, warn Ahu and his men."

Harper nodded. Anne's courage and wit, the young Atlantean's bravery in deliberately seeking imprisonment, would be responsible if he escaped. Once free he must not disappoint them . . . must see that the men of Thyllos escaped destruction in the submarine gardens. Squaring his shoulders, he watched Hatan place another drop of the green acid upon the lock.

"Now!" The Atlantean threw his shoulder against the door, pushed. A grinding, rattling of broken corroded bronze followed, and the door swung open.

"Good!" Don stepped softly into the corridor, his eyes exultant. "Which way do we take?"

"Follow me." Hatan turned to the left. "We . . ." The words died on his lips as sharp footsteps echoed along the corridor. A guard, a great burly man clad in ragged finery with scarlet sash and head-cloth, was striding along the passage, humming a ribald drinking song. In his hand glittered a cutlass-like shock-sword.

AT SIGHT of the guard, Hatan gripped Don's arm, dragged him back into the shadows. Nearer and nearer moved the hulking Karsisian, still unconscious of the two men crouching in the darkness. Yet it was only a question of time, Don realized, before he would catch sight of them. And two unarmed men would be helpless before the terrible power of the long weapon. In hopeless desperation, Don tensed his muscles, determined to go down fighting.

The jailor was nearly abreast of them, now, and for a moment Don hoped he might pass them by. Suddenly, however, the drinking song came to a sudden end and a deep-throated oath took its place. Cutlass spitting sparks, the big man sprang toward them.

In that instant, before Don could launch himself forward, Hatan's arm flew forward. Something bright, golden, shot from it . . . the curiously needle-like stopper of the vial of acid. Glistening wetly with the deadly "tears of Poseidon," it struck the guard's bared forearm, traced a tiny red furrow across it. A queer acrid smell filled the corridor and the huge guard stood rooted with horror, his bulging eyes fixed on his blackening flesh. For just so long as is necessary for blood to pass from one's arm to one's heart, he remained erect, then, his skin as dark as that of some long-dead corpse, he toppled to the floor.

"Quick!" Hatan handed Don the cutlass, armed himself with a long dagger from the guard's sash. "This way!"

The American nodded, ran swiftly after his young guide. Past cell after cell, they raced, some empty, some occupied by bearded ragged unfortunates who stared in surprise as the two fugitives passed.

At length, after perhaps fifteen minutes of flight, they reached the end of the corridor. Here a stairway of great stone blocks rose into the shadowy darkness above. Upward the two fugitives climbed, hearts pounding, feet padding softly upon the damp glassy basalt. Suddenly, as the

staircase twisted in a steep spiral, light gleamed ahead and the shadows of three sentries were visible in sharp silhouette against the wall. For just a moment the fleeing prisoners paused, recovering their breaths, crouching for the attack. Don, his teeth bared in a fierce fighting smile, glanced at Hatan. The young Atlantean was stern, frowning grimly as he prepared to strike a blow for the freedom of his people. Gripping the dagger, he gave an imperceptible nod.

Side by side, the two men plunged forward, bounding up the few remaining steps. Shouts of alarm went up from the trio of sentries; whipping swords from their insulated scabbards, they braced themselves to meet this unexpected assault.

Striking with berserk fury Don leaped to the attack, cutlass raised, to be met by a grinning, scarfaced warrior. As their weapons clashed, he saw Hatan hurl his dagger, saw one of the three Karsisians crumple to the floor. Swiftly the Atlantean snatched up his sword, engaged the remaining guard.

No time for Harper to follow his companion's efforts; the scarfaced man was pressing him vigorously. A blue arc of flame leaped between their swords as his bull-like adversary sought to drive him back by sheer strength. Deftly Don turned the other's wild lunges, thankful for his years on the Naval Academy's fencing team. Time after time he parried the Karsisian's whistling strokes, awaiting an opening.

All at once his opponent lashed out in a clumsy feint at his legs, then, as Don's guard dropped, aimed a vicious blow at his head. Not an instant too soon the American side-stepped; the highly charged blade passed within an inch of his shoulders. Before the scarred man could raise his weapon again, Don had straightened out his arm, pressed the point of his sword against his opponent's chest. Gasping, the man went rigid, then slumped limply to the floor.

As the Karsisian fell, Don sprang forward to assist Hatan. The youth, no match for his seasoned antagonist, was retreating desperately toward the stairs, evading by a miracle the touch of the deadly blade. In an instant Don was at his side, pressing the guard from another quarter. Like a bolt of blue lightning, his cutlass licked out and the last of the sentries toppled inertly to the stone flags.

"So!" Hatan panted. "Mighty Poseidon smiles upon us! Make haste, for the sound of the struggle will draw more of their fighting men!"

Again the two fugitives resumed their advance, dodging through narrow passages, turning, twisting through a maze of shadowy corridors. Once a frightened servant appeared before them, but a mere wave of the gleaming swords put him to flight. Suddenly, far behind them, they heard shouts, the clatter of arms.

"The alarm has spread!" Hatan cried. "Hurry!"

REDOUBLING their efforts, they raced onward. Through the gloomy vaults of the ancient fortress they ran, arriving at length in a square, dimly lit room, the walls of which were adorned with weird frescoes. Hatan dashed across the room, tugged at a square bronze door. It swung ponderously open and a moment later they had stepped through into a side street of the city.

"Sheathe your sword," Hatan whispered, "and walk slowly. We must not be known for escaped prisoners!"

Don nodded, followed his guide along the little alley. In the eternal golden twilight that cloaked the undersea islands, he could see signs of revelry as Karsis celebrated the forthcoming victory over their ancient enemies of Thylos. Those who had been left behind to guard the city seemed to take their charge lightly. Casks of wine stood before the great marble buildings that had been converted into taverns; brawny freebooters, their faces

flushed with drink, applauded the lithe Atlantean dancing girls, while groups of Karsisians crowded the gaming tables—shouting, cursing, laughing. Absorbed in their pursuit of pleasure, the motly throngs paid scant heed to the two passersby.

Don and his companion had reached the outskirts of the city before the clamor arose behind them. From the slopes that rose behind Karsis they could see armed guards dashing through the streets, joined by their followers from the wine-shops, the taverns.

“Now what?” Don muttered, glancing at the hills before them. “No chance of reaching the locks . . . and the island is as much of a prison as the cells we just left.”

“There is a way,” Hatan exclaimed. “Hurry! The road to the temple of Bel is long!”

Shrugging, Don followed his companion up the wooded hillside. No time to seek explanations, now. To trust blindly in the Atlantean in hopes of escaping Karsis, reaching the army from Thyllos, warning them of the trap . . . that was the only way. The thought of Anne, a prisoner in the hands of Gismond, was terrifying . . . yet if the men of Thyllos were victorious, Karsis taken, she would suffer no harm.

The city below was lost from view, as Hatan led the way through groves of gold and purple trees, orchards that resembled great patches of scarlet flame. In brilliant profusion, the bizarre vegetation of the Isles of the Blest rose on all sides . . . a riot of color, a mingling of a dozen sweet scents. As they ploughed through this living paradise, Don found his thoughts on the world a mile above. Had the fleet of the Eurasian Alliance left its base at Teneriffe to attack America? Whatever the outcome of the struggle, the loss of life, the destruction, in the United States would be tremendous. And if Varhely received the secret of anti-gravity as a price for the success of his ambush, nothing could save America from ruthless conquest. Unless he and Hatan

could win through, warn Ahu, the surface world would be dominated by savage, warlike despots, its inhabitants enslaved just as these trusting Atlanteans had been enslaved by the fierce buccaneers cast upon their shores . . .

“Listen!” Hatan paused, stood motionless. The shouts behind them were growing louder; the Karsisians were overtaking their prey!

“Nearer!” Don muttered, resuming the flight through the dense underbrush. Now they were forced to cut their way, sword in hand, through the tangle of strange vines. Clothes in rags, faces furrowed by low-hanging branches, damp with sweat, they struggled on. A faint crashing of bushes further down the slope warned of their pursuers’ approach.

Suddenly, when it seemed to Don that the journey must never end, Hatan gave a gasping cry of joy. Before them was a small clearing, in the center of which lay a simple little woodland temple. Of less massive construction than the other works of the Atlanteans, it was in ruins. Pillars broken, roof fallen in, overrun with vines, the temple seemed like some age-old mausoleum.

“At last!” Hatan sprang through the crumbling entrance, made his way across the moss-grown floor. Following, Don beheld a strange, hideous statue, twice life size, a gross, obese figure, bull-headed, monstrous. Bel, the Father of Evil, sat crouched upon his granite throne defiant of the passing centuries.

Hatan had dropped to his knees, as though in prayer before the image; his fingers were feeling along the base of the statue in search of something. Curious, Don watched him, then, as the sounds of pursuit drew nearer, his doubts found voice.

“What’re you looking for?” he demanded. “There’s no way of passing the dome of force from here! Unless we reach Ahu . . .”

“Patience!” Hatan muttered. “Here the

six high priests of Bel had a passageway leading to secret locks, by which they might escape in time of peril. Its existence is known only to a few, and it has been long since I was taught the secret. Beneath the base there is a lever . . . Ah!" He tugged at an ornamental projection, stepped back.

AT ONCE a creaking grinding of stone met Don's ears. Slowly, as though unused for milleniums, massive machinery began to clank, and the great bull-faced statue turned on its pedestal, revealing a dark opening.

"Down!" Hatan exclaimed. "Hurry! They come!"

Don flung a glance over his shoulder. Burly bearded figures were running across the clearing, their swords glistening. Hastily he swung himself into the dark opening, touched steps cut in the stone. Behind him Hatan pressed the knob back into place, then, as the statue started to swing once more on its pedestal, leaped through the narrowing entrance. A shower of sputtering arrows rattled against the image, running feet drummed upon the floor of the temple. Desperately one of their pursuers leaped for the opening; his foot slipped through the closing aperture, but the massive machinery ground inexorably on. An agonized scream of pain, a crunching of bone, and the last strip of light above the two fugitives vanished.

Blind in the stygian darkness of the tunnel, Don stumbled down the steps.

"No fear of losing the way," Hatan said, behind him. "There is but one tunnel."

Downward the steps led, ever downward, until it seemed that they had no end. A musty smell of incalculable age hung in the air, and their footsteps were muffled by the dust of time. At last the stairway ended and a dark passageway lay before them. Once Don's groping hands encountered mouldering copper chains that rattled ominously under his touch.

"This passage had other uses than as a

means of escape," Hatan muttered. "Our forefathers did well to turn from bloody Bel to merciful Poseidon!"

Long minutes passed, and still only interminable darkness stretched ahead. Occasionally the tunnel widened into rooms, and here Don's fingers met strange obscene statues, half-human, half-beast, that made him glad of the darkness. At length, after more than an hour of following the corridor, a greenish light gleamed ahead.

"The locks!" Hatan exclaimed. "Look!"

Don gazed along the tunnel; a large room, cut from the living stone, lay before them. A queer phosphorescent material covered the ceiling, filled the room with ghostly illumination. Set in one of the walls was a large bronze door, the entrance to a lock, while beside it hung six energy packs, of a more clumsy archaic design than those which he had previously seen or worn. Hatan took down two of the packs, handed one to Don, slipped the other upon his own shoulders. Hardly had they fastened the energy projectors into place when a storm of angry voices echoed along the corridor.

"The buccaneers!" Hatan exclaimed. "They've discovered how to move the statue, followed us! Into the lock! Quick!"

Desperately, the Atlantean tugged at a lever, and the inner door of the lock swung open. Into the chamber he leaped, followed by Don. A touch of their fingers set the energy packs in operation, surrounding them with globes of glowing force. In an instant the inner door had clanged shut; the outer one commenced to swing open. A torrent of water swept into the lock, and the two fugitives, surrounded by their energy shields, stepped out onto the ocean's floor.

CHAPTER X

INTRIGUE IN THE DEPTHS

DON and Hatan, running side by side, their spheres merged, had taken scarcely a score of steps from the

submerged lock when the Atlantean turned, glanced back. Four balls of light were advancing through the dark water toward them! Don gave an exclamation of dismay. In their haste they had forgotten the other four packs hanging upon the wall! And these, shielding four of their pursuers . . .

"Gods of Atlantis!" Hatan muttered. "Are we to fail now, after so great an effort?" He paused, drew his sword. "I'll stay here, hold them back! Haste!"

"No!" Don cried. "You can't defeat four of them! It's suicide! I'll stick with you! Perhaps the two of us . . ."

The young Atlantean shook his head impatiently.

"Ahu knows and trusts you," he exclaimed. "While I, a captive these three centuries, am unknown to him! More, you who have recently travelled this route, can have little trouble reaching them, where I would be lost! Go!"

Don paused, indecisive. Already the four globes were near, their occupants converging on the two fugitives. Hatan's arguments were forceful, yet it seemed a coward's trick to leave him. . . .

"Mighty Poseidon!" Hatan cried. "You'll send the armies of Thylos to their doom for fear of being called a coward?" He raised his sword. "Go, or by the gods I'll slay you!"

Don nodded. Better to feel like a yellow dog than run the risk of condemning the Atlantean army to death in Gismond's trap.

"Right!" he said tightly. "Good luck, Hatan! So long!"

A moment later he was heading seaward. On the crest of a small rise he glanced back, saw Hatan's glowing globe merge with those of the four Karsisians; then as he plunged forward once more, the spheres of light faded from view in the dark kelp forests.

NOW he again felt the terrible aloneness of the ocean's floor—swift ghostly fish, the infinite blackness beyond the glow of his globe, the tomb-like silence. Moving at top speed, Don circled about until he was opposite the main locks of Karsis, picked up the vague trail that led to the marine gardens. Onward, forcing his way through tangles of seaweed, skirting huge rocks and crumbling ruins, struggling over ridges, avoiding those strange crevasses which seemed to lead to the earth's core.

As he raced toward the scene of the ambush, a thousand worries crowded his brain. Would he arrive in time? Would Ahu and his followers discover the trap for themselves? Would the fierce corsairs prove the equal of Thylos' heterogeneous regiments of fighting men?

Suddenly, as Don rounded a rocky shelf, he saw a brilliant spectacle far ahead. Energy globes! More than a thousand of them were moving in ordered ranks!—and behind their golden walls he could make out figures of every sort, from white-robed Atlanteans to armored crusaders, dragging great sledge-like vehicles loaded with supplies, equipment of every sort. The army from Thylos, moving to attack Karsis!

Shifting his gaze from the long column of spheres, Don's heart sank. Directly in front of it lay the exquisite marine gardens, row upon row of strange sponge-like growths, huge spiked plants resembling desert cacti, clumps of peculiar vines of every hue, their long tendrils waving sinuously in the water. Through this dense screen of undersea vegetation, he could see an occasional glow of light as the movement of the growths revealed spheres of energy hidden beneath the masses of kelp. Gismond and his followers, waiting in ambush!

Frantically, Don began to run toward the marching men . . . but it was too late. Already the head of the column had entered the gardens, was passing through the tall forests of seaweed. Oblivious, exultant,

they swung along, unconscious of the danger that awaited them. Dark Moors, giant Vikings, Spanish grandees . . . all striding into the trap Varhely had laid!

Don redoubled his efforts. He was less than a hundred yards from the rear of the column when the storm broke. With a single movement, the masses of vegetation opened and a torrent of glowing spheres, like huge golden marbles, rushed toward the unsuspecting men of Thylos. Globes merged, shock-swords spat blue sparks, and score upon score of the surprised warriors fell before they could even draw their weapons. A scene of mad confusion fell over the colorful gardens . . . a pantomime of death, silent, since the spheres prevented the escape of sound waves.

Frozen in his tracks, Don watched. Now the trapped force was rallying, but the losses inflicted upon them in that first bloody moment of surprise had decimated their ranks. Outnumbered, hindered by the heavy sledges laden with equipment, they were retreating doggedly before their savage assailants.

Sword in hand, Don plunged forward to join them, then suddenly halted. To his right, half buried in a thicket of weeds, lay a long slender shape, a dark skeleton of iron and steel, somehow familiar. Staring at it, Don's eyes blazed. The S-98! Wrecked, her decks ripped open by the aerial bombs, a sunken marine ghost! Yet aboard her . . . Swiftly Don turned, raced toward the struggling masses of figures.

As he sprang into the fray, a big Karsisian blocked his way. One desperate lunge of his cutlass sent the buccaneer to the ground; breathless, Don ran on. At length he found himself among the retreating forces. A blackened, dishevelled figure, striving in vain to check the rout, caught his eyes. It was Humphrey Falworth! With one leap Don was at his side. Humphrey whirled about, gasping.

"Harper!" he cried. "You here! Marry, a sad day for Thylos! We . . ."

"There's a chance!" Don interrupted. "Guns! In the submarine yonder! Greased bullets aren't affected by water! If we could clear the sub . . ."

Before he had finished speaking, Humphrey was motioning to the retreating men. A dozen of his followers broke from the fray, ran toward him.

"Sledges!" Falworth snapped. "We'll need a big dome!"

One of the men, an elegant French musketeer, seized the handle of a heavily laden vehicle; with a swift attack, they cut their way through the ring of Karsisians, raced toward the sunken sub. While the main force of Thylos continued its sullen retreat, they forced their way through the tangle of kelp toward the shattered hulk.

"Here!" Humphrey cried. "By'r lady, Devoreaux, haste!"

The Frenchman nodded, took a bulky object, a larger edition of the energy packs upon their shoulders, from the sledge. With Humphrey's aid, he placed it upon the vessel's hull, touched a lever. At once a bubble of force began to grow, surrounding the wrecked submarine, while hissing oxygen flasks filled it with air. When a large globe enveloped the entire vessel, the men entered it.

"These large domes we planned to use as 'tents' while besieging Karsis," Humphrey explained to Don. "You may turn your own sphere off now."

THE American did so, squeezed through the hole in the vessel's deck. Within, the vessel was wet, its floor a litter of shattered glass, twisted metal. Several skeletons, clad in water-soaked uniforms, were sprawled grotesquely about, while funeral wreaths of seaweed draped the cabin. Crabs and gasping fish flopped among the debris.

No time for close investigation; every moment was precious. Crawling through the wreckage, Don made his way into the

forward compartment. Here, stacked within their lockers, were rows of guns, several pistols, cases of ammunition. Hastily Don began to pass them to the men outside. Fifty-three rifles, six sub machine-guns, half a dozen automatics, and an ample supply of cartridges. When all had been handed up, Don scrambled through the hole in the S-98's hull, joined his companions, who were staring curiously at the weapons.

"How does one fire them?" Humphrey demanded. "I see no powder, no matches . . ."

"Here!" Don motioned the men toward him, demonstrated the Garands' semi-automatic action. "The bullets are placed here, and then you have only to pull the trigger. These" . . . he pointed to the sub-machine guns, the pistols . . . are equally simple. The clips are fed here, and here. Got it? Now . . ." He turned as Humphrey touched his arm, pointed. A group of Karsisians were heading toward the sub! "Each of you take three or four rifles! Pass them out to our men with ammunition and instructions as to how they work! Come on!"

Snapping on their shoulder packs, they passed through the shield about the submarine, advanced toward the group of Karsisians. At once the pirates, swords glittering, sprang forward. Globes merged, and rifles spat viciously. Shot down before they could come to close quarters, the men of Karsis were helpless. In less than a minute, the band of warriors under Humphrey and Don were racing to the assistance of their comrades.

The scene in the marine gardens was one of deadly slaughter. Inert bodies, still surrounded by the rays from their shoulder packs, lay in heaps, blackened, burnt by the deadly touch of highly charged swords. Of the thousand men who had marched so unsuspectingly into the ambush, less than six hundred remained. Completely surrounded, outnumbered two to one, they

were fighting with the desperation of the doomed. Fiercely exultant, the Karsisians crowded in upon them, swords rising and falling with deadly precision.

All this Don took in with one glance, then, a gun in each hand, hurled himself into the fray, followed by his motley troop of riflemen. Coolly, methodically, they fell upon the Karsisians, rifles roaring a song of death. For just an instant, two globes would blend, then as a bullet found its mark, one would pass on. A strange, bizarre picture it presented. Here a Roman centurian, in helmet and breast plate, aimed a rifle at a bewhiskered buccaneer; here a 17th century dandy, with wig and knee-breeches, fired a chattering sub machine-gun; and here a tall Egyptian, grave, austere, cleared a path for himself with two automatics. Bewildered, slaughtered by this hail of lead, the Karsisians wavered, fell back.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" Devoreaux, the musketeer, waved his rifle. "They yield! Haste, or, *sang dieu!* they will escape us!"

Don slipped another clip into his automatic, bored into the mass of golden spheres. Two of them merged with his own, and a scarred buccaneer raised his cross-bow. Before he could release the sputtering bolt, the gun roared and he slumped to the ground. Whirling, Don fired again, in time to check his second opponent. At that instant a furious, wild-eyed figure sprang toward him. Livid, his bald parchment-skinned head creased by a bullet, Gismond, the ruler of Karsis, plunged forward.

"Body of God!" he roared, raising his sword. "I'll . . ."

The words ended in a hacking cough as Don fired from the hip. A bloody froth welled to Gismond's lips and he crumpled, lifeless, against the wall of his globe.

The death of their leader sent a wave of panic through the thinned ranks of freebooters. Taking advantage of this hesitation, the group under Humphrey and Don

forced their way through the ring of attackers, commenced handing out rifles, handfuls of cartridges, with curt instructions as to their use. Recovering their spirits, the men of Thyllos threw themselves into the fray, rifles spitting death. Through the walls of his sphere, Don could see Captain Ross, clutching the broken stump of a sword, old Ahu, calmly directing operations as though secure within the council hall.

The buccaneers were breaking now, melting into the masses of vegetation, taking to flight. Bravery against these deadly rifles was to no avail; shot down before they could come to close quarters, use their electric swords, the Karsisians abandoned this hopeless battle.

"At them!" Humphrey cried, motioning the others forward. "Quick!"

Cheering the men of Thyllos set out in pursuit . . . but the long march, the fierce battle had taken their toll. Scattering, the Karsisians began to outdistance their exhausted pursuers. In vain, Humphrey and Captain Ross urged them on; the victors had reached physical limits. Nor were rifles of any use unless within the merged globes of force. Panting, Don watched the buccaneers vanish among the masses of undersea growth. If only there were some way of preventing the defeated Karsisians from reaching their shielded island! Once behind the great dome, they might safely resist all attempts to enter it—and Anne, in the hands of these monsters!

Don's eyes roved over the corpse-strewn gardens; most of the dead and wounded were still shielded by their energy packs, but some, damaging the delicate apparatus as they fell, lay wallowing in the mud. Already fish were beginning to gather . . . With a shudder, Don turned away.

As he returned to the scene of the battle, the warriors of Thyllos were already straggling back from their futile pursuit.

"Don!" Humphrey stepped forward, his voice vibrant with triumph. "They've

broken! Crushed! As soon as we've rested, seen to our wounded, we attack Karsis!"

CHAPTER XI

BLIND ALLEY

KARSIS, second of the Isles of the Blest, lay like a great shimmering pearl upon the ocean's floor; about it, in the manner of small gems of a rich setting, lay the dome-shaped "tents" of the besieging army. Within these were the big sledges, laden with food, oxygen tanks, machines of various types. The vari-garbed soldiers of Thyllos were also visible through their glowing walls, cleaning weapons, binding wounds, resting. Here and there about the camp paced sentries, secure within their smaller globes, rifles in their hands.

Beneath the largest of these strange "tents" sat old Ahu, his wrinkled face set in grave lines. Beside him stood Captain Ross, Humphrey, and Don. The captain, somehow dapper in his brass-buttoned coat, his white ruffled stock, was staring with moody eyes at the ocean outside. Humphrey was toying mechanically with his dagger, while Don paced restlessly back and forth.

"Then you can do nothing?" Ahu quavered. "All efforts have failed?"

"Aye." Humphrey nodded hopelessly. "Old Knem built his domes of force too stoutly. How to breach a wall of lambent energy?"

"Why not match it?" Don demanded. "The small globes from the energy-packs are all of the same vibration, the same wave-length, and so will merge, blend. They're made that way, I guess, so people going outside the domes can meet, talk. Why not make a bubble of the same vibration rate as the one surrounding Karsis? Then we could merge with it, just as two of the small bubbles merge."

"No use," Captain Ross muttered. "We can't match their vibratory rate without

machines the size of those that control the Isles. Impossible to duplicate them in less than ten years . . . if then. And the Karsisians can always vary the rate slightly . . . a hundred minor variations a minute . . . making such a method hopeless."

"Then how about blasting open the locks?" Don demanded. "Maybe, with the torpedoes from the S-98 . . ."

"Worse by far," Ross muttered. "You'd drown all the captive Atlanteans. Drown . . . Anne."

"And they can always raise the island from the ocean floor," Humphrey cut in. "To be sure, we can raise these small domes, as well, but faith, what a devilish job to attack islands while floating a hundred, a thousand feet from the bottom!" He turned to Ahu. "You say they've the smaller lock, the one Master Harper escaped by, well guarded?"

"Aye." The old Atlantean shook his grizzled head. "It presents the same difficulties as the larger one. May Poseidon aid us! Too well did our forefathers build their shields of force! We . . ." He broke off as a tall white-clad sentry entered the dome. "What now?"

"A messenger from within the city," the guard said impassively. "Under a flag of truce he seeks to parley with you."

"A parley!" Ahu exclaimed. "Perhaps they wish to strike a bargain of some sort! Admit him!"

The sentry left, returned accompanied by a powerful man in boots and ragged breeches.

"You are the leader of these forces?" the Karsisian demanded.

"Yes." Ahu nodded.

"Good. I bring you greetings from our leader, Varhely."

"Varhely?" Don gasped. "Your leader?"

"Aye," the man said carelessly. "Upon learning of Gismond's death, we voted him the place, for his knowledge of Thylos, of the upper world, were in his favor. These tidings, then, from Varhely. Unless you

abandon this siege of our island, swear never to return, he will send all captives, Atlanteans and others, through the locks without globes to protect them!"

"What!" Captain Ross cried brokenly. "Anne . . . sent through the lock to be crushed by the pressure! No, in God's name! He can't . . .!"

"Varhely gives you twelve hours to make your decision," the emissary said. "If your forces are still here at that time, he will carry out his threat. Have I your leave to go?"

Silently Ahu made a gesture of dismissal, and the messenger swaggered out.

"This settles it!" Captain Ross muttered. "You can't condemn Anne . . . the others . . . to death! And there'd be no way of saving them! No matter how quickly we rushed the lock, the pressure would crush them before we could do anything! Let's leave, Ahu! Now, at once!"

"Aye." Humphrey nodded. "No chance of entering the city, to boot. The Captain's right!"

DON stared through the walls of the small dome at the dark opaque stretches of water beyond. Varhely triumphant! Already, having through some means made himself leader of the fierce buccaneers, he would be in possession of the secret of anti-gravity. As soon as the besiegers left he would unquestionably raise Karsis to the surface, build a raft or boat, and head for Teneriffe to add this mighty force to the already overpowering Eurasian armament. America was doomed . . . Suddenly Don whirled about, faced the others, his jaw set.

"We've twelve hours!" he cried. "And a lot can be done in that time! I've a plan . . . a crazy sort of a plan! If it fails to net anything before the deadline, you can break camp, leave! And if it works, we'll take Karsis! Listen!" He spoke swiftly, tersely.

When he had finished, old Ahu remained silent, then squared his shoulders. .

"You risk your life," he said slowly. "And the plan seems hardly likely to succeed. Yet we lose nothing by staying here until an hour before the allotted time! I shall give you all the information I can, and pray that the gods watch over you. If by some miracle you should be the means of freeing our people within the city, then any reward in our power shall be yours!"

An hour later, Don Harper moved toward the main locks of Karsis. Great masses of seaweed covered his globe, obscuring its glow, making him all but invisible in the dark water. Had anyone been able to penetrate the screen, however, they would scarcely have recognized the young naval lieutenant. Dirt obscured his features, while in place of his uniform he wore the ragged garments of one of the buccaneers killed in the battle at the marine gardens. A cutlass hung at his side and the hilt of a dagger protruded from his scarlet sash. All in all, he seemed one of the swaggering freebooters who ruled Karsis.

Near the mouth of the great lock, Don paused, crouched immobile among the tendrils of kelp. Five minutes he waited, then a dozen globes approached from the camp of the besiegers. Humphrey and a troop of his followers were visible behind the spheres of force, laughing, joking, making derisive gestures at the guards behind the city's dome. Closer and closer they moved, and now Don could see that they dragged a sledge laden with equipment. The guards within the city seemed alarmed, now, as if fearing some attempt to blast open the lock.

Suddenly Don, peering through the masses of weed, saw figures running behind the city's wall of force. A moment later the great bronze door swung open and some fifty Karsisian warriors emerged, raced toward Humphrey and his troop. At once *there* was a blue flicker of swords, a flurry of sharp fighting.

Crouching, Don inched nearer. Aid from the camp had arrived, driving the Kar-

sisians back. Stubbornly, faces to the foe, they retreated toward the lock.

This was the instant, Don realized now, while the men from the city were too busily engaged to notice him. Swiftly he shook the covering from his sphere, stepped forward to join the retreating Karsisians. Hard-pressed, they paid no attention to him, believing him one of their own forces. Now they were returning to the lock, fighting back the besiegers as they did so. Less than thirty of the fifty who had made the sortie remained when all who were able to walk had entered the lock.

The massive outer door was swinging shut. Sword thrusts cleared the entrance of those among the besiegers who sought to follow. A moment later the lock had clanged shut, pumps were emptying it of water.

Don snapped off his energy pack, glanced at his companions. Clad, like himself, in ragged finery, they were panting from exertion, muttering oaths, growling threats of vengeance. And still Don's identity was not questioned.

The inner door of the lock creaked open. Blinking in the yellow haze, the remnants of the raiding party stepped out into the broad streets of Karsis. As they emerged, a tall, sallow figure strode toward them. Don clenched his fists, heart racing. Varhely! Would he be recognized?

The Eurasian aviator's eyes swept the group of returning buccaneers.

"Well?" he snapped. "Did you get the sledge?"

By way of answer, a grim-visaged Spaniard dragged forward the clumsy vehicle. Varhely stripped off its canvas cover, revealing a heap of stones.

"Just as I thought!" he growled. "A trick! Making us believe they were about to blast the locks in order to draw us out! As if they'd break open the lock, run the risk of drowning their precious kinsmen!" His gaze flicked derisively toward a group of the Atlantean slaves.

"Ten hours yet remain! Before they

have passed, these fools of Thyllos will have abandoned the siege! Meanwhile, let there be no more sorties!" Turning on his heel, Varhely strode off.

AS THEIR leader left, the party of buccaneers broke up, some heading for nearby wine shops, some returning to the posts they had abandoned when the alarm sounded. Don, falling in with a group of the former, made his way toward a tavern. Standing in the doorway sipping a beaker of wine, he surveyed the city. Its streets crowded with freebooters, its locks and fortresses well guarded, there seemed little chance of putting his plan into effect. Directly ahead lay the great palace of the kings of Atlantis below which, so Ahu had told him, were the huge machines which supplied the energy for the dome of force. In front of the building, however, the throngs were thickest. It would be necessary to wait. . . .

Minutes dragged into hours and still Don idled in the tavern, watching the slim dancing girls, the gaming tables . . . a bored, somewhat drunken pose concealed his feverish impatience. At length, one by one, the roistering buccaneers ceased their revels. Dice games ended, the music ceased, wine-laden profligates reeled off to bed. Soon the streets were empty, silent, except for the monotonous pacing of the sentinels. With a feigned stagger, Don left the wine shop, made his way toward the shadowy black palace of Karsis that reared its immense bulk above the city.

As he neared the neglected gardens surrounding the building, Don dropped to his knees, crawled toward the small postern gate set in the wall. Here a single sentry stood, reflectively eyeing the deserted city, chewing at his ragged moustache.

Silently Don drew the dagger from his sash, touched the button on its hilt that sent the deadly charge surging along its narrow blade. Still the sentry remained motionless, lost in thought. The American was

less than six feet away, every muscle tense, scarce daring to breathe. Closer and closer, keeping in the shadow of a thick, flowered hedge. . . .

All at once, Don's knee came down upon a twig, snapped it. Like the crack of a whip it seemed, in the bitter silence. Gasping, the sentry spun about . . . and as he did so, Don leaped.

One touch of the dagger's point against his breast and the Karsinian toppled to the ground, a limp, inert figure. Don turned, tried the gate, found it, as he had expected, locked. But there were vines running up the face of the building, and the narrow loophole above might admit a slim man . . . Swiftly Don sprang forward, grasped the vines, commenced to climb.

The ascent was hazardous. Twice tendrils of the queer purple vine pulled away from the wall as he put his weight upon them; but both times he managed to grasp another strand before falling. At length he reached the deep-set window, dragged himself upon its sill.

There were no bars in the narrow aperture. Don squeezed through, dropped lightly to the floor. He was in a corridor, it seemed, though where it led he could not tell. Very cautiously, he crept along, sword in hand. The great building was like a tomb; none of the doorways which he passed showed light. At length the corridor met a cross-passage. Don glanced up and down, undecided. The machines controlling the wall of force lay, Ahu had said, below the palace. And to reach them he must find steps, go downward. But which way. . . .

Suddenly, as he stood there, Don froze to immobility. Sharp footsteps shattered the silence behind him! Snapping about, he saw a squat Karsisian, his rusty armor glinting dully, striding toward him!

All at once, the buccaneer caught sight of him, gasped.

"Dammee!" he roared. "What knavery

is this? Noll! Portugee! Hastel!" Sword gleaming, he sprang forward.

With a quick leap, Don jumped into the cross-passage, lost himself in the shadows. Behind him he could hear the clatter of armor, the labored breathing of his pursuer. Soon other voices had taken up the cry as the dark castle came to life. Don redoubled his efforts, twisting, winding, among the maze of passages.

All at once, as he rounded a corner, Don gave an exclamation of despair. The passage came to a halt directly before him! He was in a blind alley! Trapped!

Glancing about, his gaze swept the four doors that opened upon the *cul-de-sac*. Of copper, they were curiously worked with strange images and devices. As Don hesitated, undecided which to open, the thudding footsteps drew nearer and nearer. All at once, from one of the rooms, he heard a sound of weeping, gasping sobs. A woman's voice! Swiftly he turned the handle, stepped across the threshold.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROMISED REWARD

THE room was small, hung with rich draperies. At one end of it was a low couch, upon which lay a sobbing figure . . . the figure of a girl. Silken robes clung to her slender form; her hair flowed in dark rivulets over the pillow; her lips were a scarlet slash against her fair skin. With the click of the door, the girl gave a muffled cry, sat up.

"Anne!" Don whispered. "Anne!" Then, as hoarse shouts echoed through the corridor outside, "They . . . they're after me! The guards!"

"Here!" The girl sprang from her couch, drew back the heavy tapestries against the wall. "Quick!"

Nodding, Don stepped behind the arras. Hardly had the curtain settled back into place when a barrage of knocks sounded

upon the door. Throwing a robe over her sheer night-dress, Anne opened it.

"Yes?" she said coldly.

The squat guard's eyes darted about the room.

"I saw a stranger in the passageway," he muttered. "He may have entered here."

"Do you see him?" the girl said evenly. "Do you think he could have come in here without my knowledge? Varhely will be pleased to learn of the visions of his drunken guardsmen!"

"Aye, Roger!" One of the man's companions laughed. "Wine does strange tricks. There are no intruders here! Come, let's to bed!"

The stocky Roger swore, glanced uneasily at the girl. She had, it was rumored, great influence with Varhely. And there was, he knew, wine upon his breath.

"As you wish," he said stiffly. "Yet I saw what I saw. If Varhely prefers the word of this wench to that of honest men, he's more the fool! Come!" Motioning to his companions, he left the room.

When the door closed, Don stepped from behind the curtain.

"Too narrow for comfort," he said grimly. "I expected any moment he would search the room. You . . . you've been well treated."

"Yes." Anne laid a hand upon his arm. "But what are you doing here? How did you enter the city?"

Swiftly Don told of his plan, his entrance through the lock with the defeated Karsisians. "And now," he concluded, "I've got to reach the Atlantean machines below the building! Quickly! Only a few hours are left! Unless I can do something at once, Ahu will have to abandon the siege to prevent you and the others from being sent through the locks!"

The girl nodded hopelessly.

"Often have I seen the vast engines beneath Thyllos," she murmured. "But to reach the ones here is impossible!—guards

at every door, every flight of steps . . . you would be killed before you had passed the first doorway! It's suicide, Don! Better for me, the others, to remain here, prisoners, than for you to throw away your life without a chance of success! There's no hope of . . ." The girl broke off, eyes wide with horror, as the door of the room burst open.

"So!" The stocky Roger sprang across the threshold, sword in hand. "A single move, knave, and I touch you with this blade! I was sure that by remaining outside the door I would hear voices! Perhaps Varhely will believe his 'drunken guardsman' now!"

Don stood motionless. The point of the buccaneer's sword was within an inch of his chest. One touch of it, he knew, meant death. He glanced at Anne. She was like an ivory image, drained of all color, her eyes tortured.

"Come!" Roger laughed. "Let us go! Varhely will want to see his guest!"

SHOULDERS drooping, Anne moved toward the door. As she passed Roger, however, she lunged to one side, caught his arm and dragged it down.

"Don!" she cried. "Quick!"

Even as she spoke, Don leaped forward, his dagger glittering in his clenched fist.

"Drop your sword!" he exclaimed. "And be silent!"

The squat buccaneer obeyed, and the blade fell from his hand, sputtering blue sparks upon the damp stone floor.

"And now," Don laughed, "Master Roger and I are going to the caverns below the palace! He will explain to the sentries that we are on an important mission, knowing that a word of warning will mean his death! Eh, Roger?"

The Karsisian nodded in sullen assent. One hand on his captive's arm, the other on the hilt of his dagger, Don turned toward the door.

"Don!" Anne's fingers brushed his cheek. "You . . . you'll be careful?"

"Right!" He flashed her a smile. "All set, Roger? Let's go!"

Memory of that walk lingered long in Don Harper's memory—dark passages, their walls glistening with slime, endless flights of steps, hewn from the living stone, massive doors of green, age-old bronze. And at each stairway, each corridor, each doorway, were guards, still, erect fellows, cruel-faced, insolent. As they approached each set of sentries, Don's heart increased its tempo, and his grip upon Roger's arm tightened. Yet never once did his captive's voice waver, or the curt explanation vary. His life, he knew, would come first, regardless of what else happened.

Don could feel pressure upon his eardrums, silent proof that the steps, the slanting galleries, had carried them far below the palace. The descent had seemed interminable and precious moments were slipping by. Quickening his pace, he urged his captive onward.

Now the last two sentries were passed, and a stone door blocked the way. Unlocked, it yielded to Don's touch. Still keeping Roger at his side, he stepped through.

The sight that greeted their eyes was so incredible that for a moment Don believed it to be some sort of illusion. A cavern, immense, endless, lit by a thin, ghostly light, lay before them . . . a cavern filled with gargantuan machinery. Huge grinding wheels, turbine-like engines, spinning cogs, all were roaring a song of power. Vast, dim, unreal, it seemed . . . Don felt like an ant that had inadvertently crawled into a grandfather's clock. As the cyclopean mass of machinery turned in its ageless manufacture of energy, great sprawling shadows flickered across the walls; jets of greenish flame danced like eerie lightning between terminals and a network of glowing tubes made a luminous spider's web over-

head. Power . . . the mighty cavern seemed a crucible of power . . . awe-inspiring, frightening!

Stunned by the grandeur of the sight, Don was seized with a feeling of his own insignificance. The spectre of the Atlantean super-scientist, Knem, the ghosts of countless thousands of toil-slain slaves, seemed to defy him, warn him against tampering with the works of men who were akin to the gods. And yet, for the sake of their descendants, for the honor of desecrated Karsis. . . .

A sudden movement on the part of his captive broke the weird spell. Roger had made a swift leap for the door.

Whirling, Don sprang. The buccaneer's hand had just closed over the door's handle when a knotted brown fist crashed against his jaw. Silently, he slumped to the ground. With trembling haste, Don tore strips from his captive's shirt, bound him securely, then turned once more to the maze of machinery.

Directly opposite him was a small platform, covered with curious dials, gauges, and switches, all marked with hieroglyphs. Don mounted the stone steps, studied the apparatus carefully. The great dome of force covering Karsis was, Ahu had told him, divided into many segments. Don reviewed mentally the old Atlantean's instructions. To do his task correctly, it was necessary to locate the correct segment, to momentarily remove it. Again Don surveyed the immense wheels and cogs, then, picking up a peculiarly-shaped wrench from the heap of tools beneath the control panel, he commenced work. Would he be able to finish the long task in time, he wondered? Face set in tense, drawn lines, he unloosened the first bolt.

As Don worked, the city above him woke. Parties of sleepy guards hurried along the broad streets, dragging wretched, half-starved Atlantean slaves. The buccaneers, grizzled leathery men, paid scant heed to the protestations of their captives; laugh-

ing, they herded the pitiful groups forward with waves of their shock-swords.

In the big square before the main locks, rows of men and women stared with hopeless eyes at the array of glowing spheres far beyond the dome of force, that marked the camp of their comrades. Yet between the marble splendor of Karsis and the "tents" of the besiegers lay the dark, greenish water . . . a barrier of death. Anne, standing in the front ranks of the slaves, gazed at it in horrified fascination. Less than an hour remained. Would the men of Thylos break camp, abandon the siege in time to save them? And what of Don . . . would his desperate plan succeed?

Varhely, standing upon the steps of the ancient Atlantean palace, smiled smoothly. Already the ancient Atlantean tablets explaining the secret of anti-gravity were in his possession. As soon as the siege was raised, he would lift Karsis to the surface, make his way to Teneriffe. And then, with the greatest forces of all time in the hands of the Eurasian Alliance . . .

"They'll quit!" he murmured to the group of followers about him. "They're sure to break! Old Ahu'll never permit his people to drown. Which is what we want. No sense in destroying our slaves." His gaze flicked toward Anne, a slim, erect figure not a hundred feet from where he stood. "How much more time?"

ONE of the men glanced at a big water clock nearby; its float had sunk nearly to the last marker. "Three-quarters of an hour," he said. "Still they show no signs of breaking camp. Perhaps if we put, say, a score of these dogs through the locks by way of warning. . . ."

"Wait." Varhely nodded complacently. "Give them full time." He paused, glancing about. "Where's Roger? He was to have taken charge of the prisoners. . . ."

"Eh?" his companion frowned. "Why, he went below some hours ago, to the cav-

erns. On your orders, he said. One man accompanied him."

"My orders!" The spy straightened up, frowning, then turned toward the entrance of the palace. "Put the slaves through if the time limit expires! I'm going to find Roger!"

In the huge underground power-plant, Don Harper worked with furious haste, dismantling the control panel. Sweat-soaked, black with the dust of ages, he seemed a demon from the pit. Suddenly, with a gasp, he straightened up. Two queer copper wires, as thick as a man's finger, lay exposed. These, according to Ahu's instructions, had only to be touched, held together for the space of one breath, then separated again. Grinning exultantly, he reached down, grasped them.

At that instant a shout of rage echoed above the roar of the machinery. Don dropped the wires, turned! Varhely!—plunging toward him, sword in hand!

Jerking erect, Don snatched up his own cutlass. With a shower of sparks, a resounding clash, the two blades met. Cautiously, the men fenced, Varhely furious, shouting for aid—Don, tight-lipped, his eyes dull with despair.

The swords were whirling in circles of steel, now; parrying, lunging, the two men did a wild dance of death in the shadow of the huge whirling machinery. Their shadows sprawled in grotesque silhouette across the walls, flickering in the lambent arc of current that leaped between the swords. Back and forth they swayed, always avoiding the touch that, however slight, meant instant death. Like duelling with poisoned rapiers, Don thought, only far worse, since the skin need not even be broken for the lethal charge to have effect.

Varhely's shouts were being answered; a thud of running feet echoed along the corridor that led to the cavern. Don shook his head. The guards from the passageway! No chance! Unless. . . .

Swiftly he began to retreat toward the doorway. Varhely laughed sardonically, pressed on. The American would be caught between him and the advancing guards! They were near, now, running toward the power plant.

Suddenly Don's cutlass licked out in two lightning thrusts, and Varhely was forced to leap backwards to save himself. In that instant Don threw his weight upon the big stone door. With a ponderous crash it slammed shut in the very faces of the advancing Karsisians; the massive bolt fell into place.

Quick as Don had been, Varhely had leaped once more to the attack. Turning from the door, Harper had barely time to raise his sword, ward off a murderous blow. Yet though he parried his opponent's stroke, his own blade, loosely held, flew from his hand, clattered across the small cleared space.

With a cry of triumph Varhely drew back his arm, prepared for the final deadly thrust. No time to think . . . Don acted instinctively. Ducking beneath that striking steel, he threw a hundred and eighty pounds of bone and sinew against his opponent.

Unprepared for this flying block, the Eurasian aviator staggered back, clawing at the air in a vain effort to recover his balance. Reeling, gasping, he tottered for an instant in the shadow of the gargantuan wheels, then toppled back into the maw of the machinery. For the merest fraction of an instant, the great cogs hesitated, then with a sickening crunch, the reddened spokes continued to turn on their inexorable way.

Dazed, panting, Don sprang toward the control plant. Outside, the guards continued their frenzied pounding at the door. Swiftly he snatched up the two wires, held them together.

In the square before the city's locks, Anne Ross stared with morbid fascination

at the marker of the big water clock. Suddenly a cry of despair arose from the ranks of the Atlantean slaves. The marker was level with the top of the big jar!

OUT beyond the dome, gleaming through the dark water, lay the glowing "tents" of the besieging army . . . unmoved! A sharp command rang from the group of buccaneers by the lock. At once guards, shock-swords in hand, herded the front rank of captives toward the great bronze doors.

Stoically, from long years of slavery, the Atlanteans moved toward the entrance. Head high, Anne walked with them. Just as they were about to step into the metal chambers, however, a roar of triumph rose from the grim-visaged buccaneers.

"They break camp! The siege is lifted!"

Anne stood like a run-down robot, her eyes bleak. Ahu and her father, fearing Varhely's threat, were returning to Thyllos! And the threat which drove them away would prevent their ever returning! She and these once-proud men and women of Atlantis were doomed to an eternity of subservience, slaves of the drunken, obscene warriors who ruled Karsis!—a slavery that would know no end, thanks to the immortality produced by the rays of force! Hopelessly, the girl turned away.

Anne's hopelessness was not shared by her alone. Humphrey Falworth and fifty fighting men of Thyllos, crouched beside the dome that surrounded Karsis, watched the retreat of the main body of the besiegers with bitter eyes. Not that Ahu, Captain Ross, were to blame for refusing to slaughter the captives within the city . . . but he, Humphrey, had hoped that Don's plan would succeed, that they would be able to snatch victory from defeat. Now, however, their last hope seemed to have failed. Gripping his rifle, Humphrey peered through the screen of kelp that concealed their globes. Behind the city's invisible wall

of force he could see the Karsisians cheering, waving their weapons in triumph. They had won! While the men of Thyllos. . .

And then it happened! The segment of the dome behind which Humphrey and his followers crouched became misty, bulged! Suddenly a roaring torrent of water was spouting through an opening in the dome of force, sweeping Humphrey's little band through the aperture! Shielded by their globes of force, they shot forward, under the tremendous pressure of a mile down, tumbled like huge round electric bulbs into the streets of Karsis!

Within the space of one breath, the attackers had been sucked through the opening, then as if by magic it closed once more behind them. But in that instant, enough water had gushed into the shielded island to fill its broad highways to the height of a man's knees.

Humphrey, picking himself up, snapped off his energy pack, glanced about. The city was a scene of wild confusion—the groups of Atlantean slaves gazing about in mingled hope and terror, the ragged, fierce buccaneers plunging sword in hand toward these invaders who had entered through the momentary breach in the energy shield.

"Quick!" Humphrey cried. "Fire!" He threw his rifle to his shoulder, squeezed the trigger.

A roar of musketry echoed beneath the great dome, and a hail of bullets swept the advancing buccaneers. Again they charged, and again the rifles and sub machine-guns chattered their deadly choruses. Hopeless, such a struggle; it was impossible to get near enough to bring the lethal swords into play. Mowed down, torn by a storm of shot, the Karsisians broke, scattered.

Humphrey, reloading his rifle, shot a glance through the shimmering wall of the dome. Far out in the dark water, golden globes were assembling, moving swiftly toward the city.

"Ahu and the rest of the men!" he

shouted. "They're coming back! They've seen what's going on! We've got to reach the locks, open them!" Waving his band forward, he sprang toward the great bronze doors.

Others were there before him . . . the Atlantean slaves! As their harsh captors broke, fled, a wave of hope swept over the crowd of Atlanteans. Surging toward the locks, they overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers those buccaneers who remained at their posts, took over the controls. By the time Humphrey had reached them, Captain Ross and the advance units of the army of Thyllos were marching from the lock!

More, and still more, poured into the dome, sweeping the demoralized buccaneers into flight, cutting down all who offered resistance. The slaves, hastily armed, were pursuing their erstwhile masters, in quest of long-delayed retribution. Within an hour, Karsis, second of the Isles of the Blest, was once more in the hands of its rightful owners.

In the great cavern below the palace, Don Harper could hear the distant rattle or rifle fire. Feverish with impatience, he leaned against the big door, listening; the guards outside no longer sought to force an entrance; he could hear them conversing in worried tones, pacing back and forth indecisively.

Suddenly there were shouts in the passageway, a half-hearted clatter of arms that ceased abruptly. Then voices, familiar voices, were calling his name. With trembling fingers, he drew the massive bolt, opened the door.

"Don!" Anne cried. "You . . . you've done it! Saved Karsis . . . saved us all! Oh, Don, I was so afraid . . ."

Captain Ross, Humphrey, crowded forward to shake his hand. A moment later old Ahu joined them, his wrinkled face triumphant.

"United once more the twin cities of Atlantis!" he cried. "Poseidon be praised

that his free-born people are no longer slaves! And to you, Don Harper, the thanks of our race! I offered you anything within our power if you succeeded. We are anxious to prove that these are more than mere words!"

"Anything within the power of Atlantis?" Don cried. "Right! Listen, Ahu! A few miles from here, on the surface, a great fleet is assembling for the purpose of conquering my homeland, America! Lend me your aid in destroying it!"

For a full minute Ahu was silent, lost in thought. At length he spoke.

"For twice ten thousand years we have cut ourselves off from the world above," he said gravely, "for we feared that the fate of Karsis might be ours. Yet you have helped us free this Isle, helped us in overcoming our enemies. It is, then, only right that we help you overcome yours. "Humphrey" . . . he turned . . . "send a dozen men along the sea-bottom to Teneriffe to observe the movements of the Eurasian fleet and report to us when it leaves for America! You, Zoran," . . . he motioned to a tall Atlantean beside him . . . "bring all the craftsmen and scientists of Karsis here! We must start work at once!"

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE WAVES

A WEEK later the Eurasian fleet left the Canaries. Its commander, Czensky, stood upon the bridge of his flagship, gazing exultantly at the long line of vessels—great battle-wagons, sleek cruisers, twenty big aircraft carriers, all surrounded by flotillas of destroyers and submarines. The greatest armada ever assembled, it steamed in close formation, heading west. Behind it, veiled in the smoke of a thousand funnels, lay the distant hills of Teneriffe; ahead, the grey wastes of the Atlantic stretching onward until they met the dim horizon. A thin cruel smile played over Czensky's lips as

he surveyed this tremendous array of sea-power. Turning, he motioned to an officer who stood nearby.

"Any news from the Pacific?"

The officer saluted, came to attention.

"A radiogram from our Asiatic forces, sir," he said. "They are holding the American fleet in the Pacific, avoiding direct engagements but keeping the enemy well occupied. The bombing of the Panama Canal has been in our favor, also. Our reports show that apart from a few obsolete coast defense guns, the Atlantic seaboard is at our mercy."

"There will be no mercy!" Czensky exclaimed. "One sharp lesson should bring them to their knees! Our bombers, our guns, will destroy New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington!—pound them into heaps of rubble. With their big cities wiped out, millions of civilians killed, they'll whine for peace!" He glanced at the big 16-inch guns below them. "It will make nice gunnery practice! We have only to lie off shore, systematically shell their cities! So simple . . ." He broke, off, staring. "What's that?"

To the right, some distance from the line of ships, there was a swirling, boiling of the water—a strange submarine eruption of some sort, it seemed, sending forth vast waves! Suddenly Czensky gasped. Another giant whirlpool was stirring up the sea to their left!

Now a point of light was emerging from the waves, growing larger and larger with each instant. Two huge glowing domes were thrusting above the sea!

"What are they?" the officer muttered. "God! What . . ."

"Some . . . some trick!" Czensky said harshly. "Some new type of sub! Give the order to fire!"

A wild confusion had spread over the huge armada. Formations were broken up, ships were circling the glowing domes. As Czensky's orders were sent out, the flotilla stirred to swift grim activity. Tarpaulins

were stripped from guns, planes took to the air, huge muzzles swung toward the Isles. Then, with an ear-shattering roar, a storm of gun-fire broke.

Leaning over the rail of the bridge, the commander gave a narrow smile, waited for the smoke to clear away . . . and then he swore. The golden domes were intact!

"Again!" he shouted. "All ships!"

Once more the sea shook as guns of every size and type fired, point-blank. And still the domes of energy held!

Old Ahu, standing before the temple of Poseidon, shook a scornful head.

"They hope to penetrate a shield of force!" he muttered. "Madness! Let the first ship sink!"

Don nodded, flashed signals to the men on the ocean's floor. Here there were strange pieces of machinery, well shielded by energy domes, to which cables from the power plants of the Isles were connected. Upon receiving directions from Don, the Atlanteans moved their machines into position, adjusted levers. All at once the engines began to hum a deadly ominous drone.

Don peered through the energy screen, staring at the first of the great battleships. Slowly, as though being drawn down by an invisible string, it was beginning to settle lower in the water! The men on its decks, caught by the terrible force of gravity, could barely crawl. Deeper and deeper it sank, until the decks were awash. Suddenly the waves closed above the ship, bubbles of air dotted the surface, and the vessel was gone!

Consternation reigned throughout the great fleet. The firing had ceased, men were leaping into the sea, brushing aside frantic officers in an effort to launch the lifeboats. Battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers, all were held fast by the inexorable gravitational drag, were slowly submerging. Destroyers alone were left unharmed, in order to pick up the survivors . . . for these light craft, Don knew, could constitute no menace to America.

IN LONG grey rows across the sparkling sea stretched the main portion of the Eurasian fleet . . . sinking lower with each second. Quietly, Don gave his directions to the men below the surface. The gravity generators, a mile down, increased their deadly hum. One by one, the helpless vessels went under . . . funnels, masts, then only the foaming waves, littered with wreckage, struggling men. Suddenly old Ahu nodded sombrely.

"It is done!" he said. "Let the others, the small ships, rescue those who survive! Atlantis has paid her debt to you, Don, and America no longer need fear for her liberty!"

Anne, standing beside them, shuddered. One minute, a great fleet, proud, arrogant,

in the full panoply of war, bent upon easy conquest . . . and now, only a scattering of little destroyers seeking to drag the struggling seamen from the waves!

"Gone!" she whispered. "A hundred ships. . ."

"And a million homes, ten million lives saved from destruction!" Don said. "These" . . . he glanced at the white-robed Atlanteans before the temple . . . "these men from the past have given the world a new future!"

Anne nodded, placed her head upon Don's shoulder. Silently they watched the wall of water rise outside the dome. One last look they had of the blue, cloud-flecked sky, then the Isles, in all their golden, brilliant beauty, sank beneath the waves.

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FUTURE FACTS

EDITORIAL BY

CHARLES D. HORNIG

“**N**OTHING is impossible.” That’s a pretty broad statement, but we like to believe it. It has been said that nothing imaginable by the mind of man is impossible, and that should certainly include science-fiction. In fact, science-fiction is the only element that permits *everything* imaginable!

The stories that are in FUTURE FICTION today might very well be our FUTURE FACTS. So many things forecasted in science-fiction stories have come to pass that it is only reasonable to suppose that science-fiction will continue to be the soothsayer of coming events.

Here’s a typical paragraph from a hypothetical science-fiction story of fifty years ago:

“And as he entered his Air-Bird, the multitudinous crowd cheered and applauded thunderously. Suddenly a low purring came from the strange machine, and, to the astonishment of the thousands present, the heavy apparatus actually raised from the ground, higher and higher, until it hung hundreds of feet above their heads. Then, with speechless astonishment, the spectators saw it disappear in the distance—a successful flying-machine!”

Now, when we read that paragraph, only one thought comes to our minds: “So what?” It’s not even interesting to us, because it happens thousands of times every day—without the breathless crowds. But imagine how such a thought must have struck our fathers when they were young!

We all know the story about how the heavier-than-air flying machine was actually *proven impossible* not many years before one left the ground for the first time. This should teach us that nothing can be proven impossible. If a thing cannot be accomplished one way, it can be done another—and will be, some day.

Take the paragraph quoted above and replace the flying-machine with a rocket-machine leaving for the moon. Then we will have a typical modern science-fictional conception. We’ve just modernized the old story, throwing it fifty years ahead, and bringing with it the same old type of unbeliever that says “Impossible!”, just as he did a half-century ago about the airplane.

Happily, there are fewer narrow-minds in the world today than there used to be. So many “impossible” fancies have become cold facts right before their eyes that the scoffers have to be careful that something isn’t accomplished even while they are saying it can’t be done.

Many scientific minds are the first to say that rocket ships will never reach the moon, for instance. But they base their prophecies upon conditions as they exist today. They do not figure that a new type of fuel, or insulation, or lighter metal, or some other scientific principle will eliminate the factors that prevent space-travel today—just as the discovery of new principles have made fact of the fiction of yesterday.

Perhaps, fifty years from now, someone will find an old, tattered copy of FUTURE FICTION. It may read to them as modern adventure, instead of prophetic fiction. The stories may only be repeating to them things that are happening in the world (or Solar System) at that time.

So let us imagine that somebody has invented a time-machine. They have gone fifty years or a century into the future, bought a modern pulp magazine of that age. They have traveled back into time, to this very day, and presented this magazine of the future to you.

It is in your hands this very minute, and you are reading it.

It is FUTURE FICTION!

INTERPLANETARY GRAVEYARD

by EDMOND HAMILTON

A great sorrow engulfs Mark Raymond as he returns to Earth from a four-month trip to Jupiter—for he learns that his Ardra had died of a strange malady. But this sorrow turns to abject horror when he finds her grave empty and desecrated by crude footprints!



The cruiser lurched violently off the ground.

MARK RAYMOND'S heart beat in eager expectation as the dumpy interplanetary freighter of which

he was second mate sank slowly toward the New York space-port.

At last, after the long four months' voy-

age to Jupiter, he was back on Earth again!—back where his thoughts had been every day of those months, back on the planet that was home to him and to the girl who filled his dreams.

"I s'pose," remarked grizzled old Captain Thorpe dryly, as the freighter sank into its dock, "that you won't waste any time seeing that gal of yours."

"I'll say I won't—I'm going to marry her tomorrow," Mark replied happily. "So long, captain."

And hastening toward the opening space-door, he was first of the crew to push out into the bright sunlight and bustling activity of the great space-port.

Mark was hurrying toward the taxiplane stands when his eager pace slowed a little. A frown came on his clean, blonde young face as he recognized the stalwart figure and dark countenance of a man striding along the busy docks.

It was Burke Ullman. And as Ullman saw him, the big interplanetary engineer stopped, a curious smile on his sardonic face.

"Just get back, Raymond?" he greeted Mark. "And on your way out to Ardra's house, eh?"

"Yes, I am," Mark said stiffly. "What of it?"

He didn't like Burke Ullman and he knew that the feeling was reciprocated. The big, satirical engineer, his unsuccessful rival for Ardra Aston's affections, had never made any secret of his enmity.

But now, surprisingly, Ullman seemed almost friendly. There was a gleam of something like amusement in his black eyes, but his manner was one of frank cordiality.

"Why, that's fine," he told Mark. "Give my regards to Ardra. And I hope you two are happy together."

Mark's stiffness thawed a little in face of this unexpected friendliness.

"Decent of you to take it that way, Ullman," he said uncertainly.

"Not at all," the big engineer answered lightly. "Run along to Ardra now. I wish I could be there when you meet her."

And with a casual wave of his hand, Burke Ullman strode on among the busy docks. Mark looked after him a little doubtfully. He felt something insincere about the engineer's sudden cordiality—

To the devil with Ullman, he decided, and strode on with quickened pace. His hand happily felt in his pocket for the rare Jovian jewels he had brought home for Ardra. In so few minutes, he'd have her in his arms!

When the taxiplane set him down in front of the shining chromium suburban cottage where lived Ardra and her widowed mother, Mark Raymond paid the driver hastily and then hurried up the walk. He heard a bell ring inside the cottage as he crossed the electric eye on the step.

IT WAS Ardra's mother, a gray-haired woman who still had something of the girl's beauty, who opened the door. Her face was white and drawn, and at sight of the young space-sailor, her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"Where's Ardra?" he cried eagerly. "I didn't radio I was arriving today—I want to surprise her."

To his amazement, the woman burst into a sob. A sudden fear clutched Mark.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "Ardra—"

Mrs. Aston was sobbing uncontrollably, and her voice was choked.

"Oh, Mark, if you'd only been here! A week ago—a strange sickness that struck Ardra—"

"Where is she? In a hospital?" he cried frantically.

"No, Mark." The woman hesitated, unable to speak for a moment. Then she whispered, "They took her four days ago—to the moon."

The blood drove from Mark Raymond's heart. He reeled, almost unable to stand

in the face of this icy news, this blasting of all his roseate hopes.

"To the moon?" he muttered stupefiedly, through stiff lips.

The girl's mother nodded. She did not need to say more. Mark Raymond well understood her dreadful meaning.

For the only people who were taken to the moon were—the dead! The moon was the cemetery of Earth.

It had been so for almost five centuries, ever since the beginning of space-travel. The moon, an airless, arid desert, was of no practical use to the people of Earth. Except for one thing—as a place to house their dead.

For that purpose, the moon was ideal. There was no corruption or decay on its barren surface, for there was no air or water or bacterial life there. The dead who were laid tenderly to rest there upon marble slabs in the open remained unchanged forever, in seeming eternal sleep.

For centuries now, all the dead of Earth had been taken there and solemnly left to slumber for eternity in the bright sunshine or deep shadow of the windless, soundless, lifeless world. And upon certain designated days, the bereaved could visit the moon and see their dead loved ones sleeping there as though they still lived.

"Ardra—dead?" Mark stumbled, unable fully to comprehend. "But she can't be dead, so quickly. See, I brought her these flame-jewels, from Jupiter. They were to be my wedding present—"

"My poor boy," uttered the woman, in torn sympathy. "If only you had been here! But you could have done nothing—all the physicians could do nothing. Ardra was stricken suddenly one night, died almost instantly. There was no one here but I and Burke Ullman."

"Burke Ullman?" The name stung Mark's numbed mind, and he raised his haggard face fiercely. "That devil—he knew Arda was dead. He was mocking me!"

Then he covered his face with his hands.

And when he finally took them away, his countenance was drawn, lined, years older in appearance.

"I'm going to the moon, today," he said thickly. "I've got to see Ardra again."

"But you can't go today," the woman said anxiously. "It isn't a visiting day—there isn't one for two weeks yet."

"Do you think I'll wait two weeks to see Ardra again?" Mark cried torturedly. "I'm going, now."

"But you know the penalties for visiting the moon except on the official days," Ardra's mother reminded him worriedly. "Please, Mark, wait until—"

But the young man was already stumbling unseeingly down the walk.

Mark never clearly remembered the next hour. He knew vaguely that he made his way back to the space-port, that he hired a small one-man space-cruiser, and that he lied stonily to the port officials, giving his destination as one of the asteroids now close to earth.

His grief so dazed him that he did all these things mechanically, unfeelingly, like a man in a dream. It was only when he found himself out in the cold black vault of space, with the dull shield of earth diminishing behind him as his torpedo-like little craft hummed toward the shining sickle of the moon, that he came to clear realization.

With dimmed, aching eyes, Mark stared ahead at the thin, gleaming sickle of the lifeless world. Somewhere there, in the great city of the silent dead who lay tranced forever on the barren satellite, was Ardra. And though she was dead, lost to him forever, he must go to her. That was all he knew.

The flat, shadowed expanse of the Mare Serenitatis rose toward him, stretching to serrated, rocky mountains whose fanged peaks were tipped with blazing sunlight. Upon this great plain lay the gigantic cemetery of earth, the necropolis in which countless millions of the dead lay dreaming eternity away.

MARK RAYMOND pulled himself together a little, headed his small craft toward the bordering mountains. He dared not land at the official landing field on the northern edge of the great necropolis. For there was the big guard-post, sheltered by an air-tight dome, which held the officials whose duty it was to guard the dead.

There were stringent laws against visiting the moon-cemetery on any but the official days, and under guidance of the guards. Those laws had been devised to protect the dead millions from those who might have dared to rob them of jewelry and other valuables upon their bodies. Mark knew well what chances he was taking in this visit.

But he did not care. What did it matter whether or not he got a term in the Mercurian prison colony, what did it matter whether he lived or died, now that Ardra was gone? All his world, all the future he had so eagerly planned, had faded into nothingness. There was left in his dazed mind only the aching desire to see again the girl he loved.

Softly, with the slightest of jars, Mark Raymond brought his little craft down to rest at the edge of the fanged hills. In a few moments he was inside his space-suit and glassite helmet. A moment more, and he stepped out through the air-lock of his ship.

A soft, silver glow, a wonderful radiance bathed the rocky plain. It was the earth-shine that relieves the lunar nights, the glow of the parent planet that loomed huge and silver in the black sky over Mark Raymond.

Mark started due westward through the unreal radiance. His lead-soled shoes dragged in the white rock dust. About him was the eternal, solemn silence of this world of the dead. He felt like the only living, moving being in the universe as he entered the great necropolis.

This city of the dead had no tombs or vaults, no graves dug beneath the surface.

All those protective devices were unnecessary on this airless world. The dead lay in the open glow of the silver earth, in beautiful simplicity.

Each lay upon a slab of white moon-marble, a few feet high. The slabs formed rows and avenues that stretched far away in the silver glow. Couches of white stone, they seemed, occupied by the motionless bodies of countless men and women and children.

Mark Raymond, his grief-dazed soul feeling doubly all the mystery and awe of death, moved between the rows of slabs, through the hushed, unchanging silence. Through his helmet, he looked at these who had done with life.

They lay as though they were but sleeping. Old men with snow-white hair and calm, wrinkled faces, other men and women still flushed with the prime of health, youngsters and girls in the bloom of youth, children who seemed sleeping tiredly after play.

No sound broke the solemn hush in which they slumbered. No wind stirred their white shrouds or their hair. They lay with quietly closed eyes and silent faces, as though dreaming of the huge silver world overhead, upon which once they had lived and loved and died.

Through the earth-lit city of the dead, Mark Raymond moved in dazed quest of Ardra. He saw by the dates on the slabs that he was in an older part of the necropolis. He moved on toward the north, until he had reached a section of the cemetery whose dead had only recently been laid to rest.

His tragic grief was a tearing thing in his breast as he searched along these newer rows of dead for the girl. It was not thus that he had planned to meet Ardra again! This was not the joyous reunion that he had dreamed of for so many weeks.

He stopped suddenly. His eyes, running along the slabs as he advanced, had seen the name he sought.

"Ardra Aston—2432-2453."

Mark stood, a hunched figure in his space-suit, staring at the chiselled words. For a moment he could not raise his eyes to look at the dead girl on the slab.

Then, with a hard lump in his throat seeming to choke him, he slowly raised his gaze. For a few moments he stared rigidly.

"Good God!" he muttered hoarsely, stupefiedly, inside his helmet.

The top of the slab was—unoccupied!

Mark stared wildly, unable to believe his eyes. What had happened to Ardra's body?

HE STUMBLED forward. Then he saw something that penetrated his dazed mind with an icy shock.

There were tracks around the slab on which Ardra's body had lain—tracks of lead-soled space-shoes, that led away southeastward through the necropolis.

Tracks of whom? Mark knew they could not be the footprints of those who had placed Ardra at rest here, for such prints were always reverently smoothed away.

"My God—grave-robbers!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

The ghastly trade of grave robbery had not been unheard of in this lunar city of the dead. Jewelry upon the unprotected bodies had tempted soulless thieves in the past, had necessitated the rules and guards which Mark Raymond had found it necessary to evade.

But if grave-robbers had been here, why had they taken Ardra's body as well as her ornaments? Mark sensed a ghastly mystery here. Hideous, formless suspicions rose in his mind.

He rushed forward, started to follow the footprints. They were deep, as though their maker had been carrying a heavy weight. And they might have been made a few minutes ago or a few days, since upon the changeless moon-plain they would remain unaltered forever.

Mark's brain was seething with wild,

horrible fears as he frantically followed the tracks through the earth-lit cemetery. Why should anyone want to steal Ardra's dead body?

The trail led out of the necropolis on the east side—and toward the nearby eastern mountains. As he advanced toward their looming, sun-tipped peaks, Mark Raymond saw something ahead that galvanized his muscles.

It was a small space-cruiser that he saw, lying in the deep black shadow of a rocky crag. At first he had thought it was his own cruiser, then had seen that this was a slightly larger ship. And the tracks he was following led straight toward it.

Mark was running now, his muscles strained to take him forward in great, floating leaps. Someone, for some ghastly reason, had stolen Ardra's body and taken it to this ship. And if the craft took off before he reached it—

Mark gasped with relief as he neared the cruiser. He had circles to approach it from the stern, so that he might not be glimpsed through its window-ports. Now, drawing the atom-pistol at the belt of his space-suit, he crept along the side of the little ship.

He stopped, went rigid, as he reached a window-port. Wildly, unbelievably, he stared in through the vacuum-sealed glass. He was looking into the front control compartment of the cruiser, which was brightly illuminated.

Upon a couch lay the lifeless form of Ardra Aston. Her eyes were closed in death, her lovely face white and still, her warm gold hair flowing over her white shroud! Mark's heart throbbed at sight of her, beautiful in death as she had been in life.

Then his eyes swung wildly to the man near the couch—a tall, stalwart man who was divesting himself of his space-suit and helmet. And as the helmet came off, Mark uttered a fierce, hissing exclamation inside his own helmet.

"Burke Ullman!"

It was the interplanetary engineer—the man who had been Mark's unsuccessful rival for Ardra's love while the girl had lived.

Ullman had put aside his suit, and now moved toward the couch on which lay the girl. The hair bristled on Mark's neck as he saw the engineer stoop over the dead girl, touch her hair, caress her with possessive hands.

Mark turned and ran wildly along the cruiser's side toward its airlock. The outer door was closed. But there was a stud on the outside, of course, by which the outer and inner doors could be manipulated.

He touched the stud, and softly the inner door closed; the outer one opened. Mark stepped inside. Another touch of a switch, and the outside door shut; the inner one opened. He stepped into the air-filled rear compartment of the cruiser, a bulky, space-suited figure clutching his pistol.

Mark went tensely to the door of the front compartment. He flung it open with a sudden gesture.

Burke Ullman looked up, startled. The engineer had been bending over the body of Ardra with a hollow needle and a thin vial of green liquid in his hand. He had not heard Mark's stealthy entrance through the airlock.

"Mark Raymond!" he cried, his dark face stiffening in stupefaction.

Mark reached up, unscrewed and tore away his glassite helmet. His atom-pistol covered Burke Ullman steadily. And his eyes were deadly as he confronted the engineer.

"Yes, it's Mark Raymond!" he choked. "And it seems I got here just in time. You fiend, what were you going to do with Ardra's body?"

BURKE ULLMAN seemed to recover his poise. A gleam flickered in his cold black eyes.

"In a way," he said deliberately, "I'm

glad you're here, Raymond. It will enable me to even an old score."

"You make one move and I'll blast you down," Mark raged. "I think I'm going to kill you anyway—a monster who could steal Ardra's dead body for God knows what unholy purpose, ought to die."

"Ardra is not dead," Ullman said flatly.

Mark stared at the engineer, stunned.

"You're crazy!" he cried at last. "Her mother saw her die!"

"She thought Ardra died, that's all," the engineer said coolly. He pointed to a small case on a table which contained a thin glass vial like the one in his hand, but filled with a bright red liquid instead of a green one.

"I injected that red drug into her blood one night, before she could resist or call anyone. It is an absolutely unique drug devised and sold to me by an old scientist out on Saturn. It has the power of inducing a catalepsy indistinguishable from death, one that suspends all the vital processes.

"The physicians Ardra's mother called certified her dead. She was brought here to the moon-cemetery and has lain as dead for days. But she's not dead, and the cold and airlessness of the moon could not affect her body, suspended as its vital processes are."

"You did that?" Mark breathed unbelievably. Then a great throb of joy shook him. He cried, "You can bring Ardra back to life, then?"

"It's what I was about to do," Ullman said calmly. He showed the hypodermic needle and the thin vial of green fluid in his hand. "This is the re-animating drug, the only antidote to the red drug. An injection of it into her blood, and Ardra will live again."

Broodingly, the engineer added, "It was the only way I could ever get her. Her childish infatuation for you was so strong that she wouldn't look at me. I decided recently to take a job offered me out in

the jungle-country of Venus, and I resolved to take Ardra with me, one way or another.

"The two drugs were the answer. I'd had something like this in mind when I bought them from the old Saturnian. I gave her a sudden jab of the red drug, and knew she'd be thought dead and brought to this moon-cemetery. I could wait a few days then secretly steal her body, revive her with the green drug, and be on my way to Venus with her. And that is exactly what I *still* intend to do, Raymond."

Mark Raymond's fingers tightened on the trigger of his pistol. He spoke in fierce, hard tones.

"Ullman, your hellish plan is ended. Hand over that vial of antidote, before I blast you down."

"If you blast me," answered Burke Ullman levelly, "you will destroy Ardra's one chance for life."

"What do you mean?" Mark cried.

"Simply that this vial is the only supply of the antidote in the whole solar system. The old Saturnian scientist who sold me the drugs died soon after. Their secret died with him. Destroy this vial of green liquid, and nothing in the system can ever wake Ardra from her living death.

"So you see, Raymond," crackled the interplanetary engineer's voice triumphantly, "I hold the whip hand here. You can blast me, yes—but not quickly enough to prevent me smashing this vial as I fall. And so when you kill me, you are sentencing Ardra forever to living death!"

Sweat beaded Mark Raymond's forehead as he perceived the strength of Ullman's position. He stared at the gloating engineer with wild eyes.

Burke Ullman raised his hand. The vial of precious green fluid was poised between his fingers, and Mark watched it with stricken, anguished eyes.

"Drop your gun and back to the wall," Ullman ordered crisply, "or I'll let this vial fall and smash!"

"You wouldn't dare!" the young man

cried hoarsely. "I'd kill you the next moment!"

"Would that bring Ardra back?" taunted the engineer. "Think, Raymond—think of her lying out there in the moon-cemetery for year after year, not really dead but not living either. That's what will happen to her unless you obey me."

Mark Raymond's soul was seething with horrible struggle. He knew the engineer meant it, that unless he obeyed, Ardra was doomed forever to sleep in deathly trance.

If he did obey, it meant death for him, Mark knew. Ullman would not let him live. And worse, it meant Ardra would be in the ruthless engineer's power, his captive in some hell-hole of a jungle outpost on Venus. Would it not be better to let her sleep on, than to have her suffer that?

MARK knew he couldn't do it. He couldn't condemn Ardra to an eternal suspended animation. Even if Ullman took her to Venus, there was always a chance that she could escape him. But once that vial smashed, there was no chance for Ardra until the world ended.

The atom-pistol clattered from Mark Raymond's hands to the floor. And stiffly, mechanically, the young man backed to the front of the control-compartment.

A flash of triumph in his black eyes, Burke Ullman swiftly stooped and recovered the weapon. Then, holding it against Mark's side, the engineer with his free hand bound Mark securely to one of the stanchions that supported the control-panel. He used a flexible metal rope, winding it tightly.

Then Ullman stepped back, his dark face gleaming with satisfied hate.

"I knew you would see the light of reason, Raymond," he smirked. "I shall attend to you when I have looked after Ardra."

"What are you going to do?" Mark demanded hoarsely.

"I am going to revivify Ardra. I am

going to give you the satisfaction of seeing her in my arms. And then I am going to give *you* the red drug!"

Mark had expected it when he had made his choice. He had foreseen that he himself would be thrust into the deathlike trance by Ullman. And though his soul was cold with horror at the thought of being plunged into that weird state that was neither death nor life, he knew that he would go into it gladly if it brought Ardra back to life.

Burke Ullman was again turning his attention to the girl. While Mark watched with haggard eyes, the engineer bound her limp wrists and ankles together. Then he filled his needle from the vial of green drug, and placed the point of the instrument against her forearm.

The needle sank in. Mark saw the engineer withdraw it, empty, and then saw Ullman bend over the girl with eager expectation. And with a tortured, yearning anticipation, Mark Raymond also watched her face.

In a moment Ardra's eyelids fluttered. Then a long sigh came brokenly from her parted lips. Her limbs stirred a little under the white shroud. And in a moment more, her lids opened; her blue eyes stared up bewilderedly.

"Burke Ullman!" she exclaimed as she perceived the man bending over her. Swift memory and fear flashed into her face. "You jabbed something into my shoulder—"

"That was in your house, a week ago, Ardra," the engineer told her. "We're not in your home now, we're not even on earth. We're on the moon."

"The moon?" she cried stupefiedly. "You mean—"

"I mean that you have been dead, my dear," Ullman said smoothly. "Not really dead, but enough like it that everyone was fooled. But now I have brought you back to life, and in gratitude you are going with me to make a lonely existence on Venus somewhat more tolerable."

"You're mad!" Ardra cried, struggling to sit up and discovering that her limbs were tied. Then, as her eyes wildly roamed the interior of the cruiser, she saw Mark Raymond tied to the stanchion by the control-panel.

"Mark!" she cried.

"You will have to forget Raymond, my dear," Ullman told the white-faced girl. "He is not going to Venus with us, I regret to say. He is going to stay here on the moon—not dead, but not living, either."

Mark yelled in hoarse rage, twisted wildly to free himself, as he saw the engineer grasp the struggling girl and possessively kiss her lips.

But the tough metal rope that held him to the stanchion was unbreakable. All his crazy efforts could not loosen it. Wildly he looked around him, in vain and desperate search for some weapon within grasp. But there was none, nor were his arms free to use it if he had one.

Ullman lowered the fainting girl's bound form back onto the couch, and straightened. There was a smile of pleasure on his dark face as he picked up the two vials of red and green liquid.

"Now for you, Raymond," he said edgely. "An injection of this red drug, and you will go into a sleep that will last while the universe lasts. But first—"

Deliberately, Burke Ullman uncorked the vial of green liquid and poured it out onto the floor.

"The only supply of the antidote in existence—and it is gone now," he taunted. "Nothing will ever revive *you*, Raymond—nothing!"

And tossing aside the empty vial, Ullman came forward toward Mark, with the vial of red drug and the hollow needle in his hand.

"It will be an easy exit, really," he mocked. "Just a pin-prick and then soothing sleep—sleep from which no rude hand will ever awaken you."

Mark Raymond's wild eyes at that mo-

ment perceived what he had been desperately searching for—a possible weapon, one which had only a chance in a thousand of succeeding, but which was his one last hope.

The starting switch on the control-panel! It was only a few feet from the stanchion to which he was tied, that panel. If he could reach the switch with his foot—

WITH a frantic motion, he raised his leg, prodded with his toe at the panel. Ardra was trying vainly to rise from her couch. Burke Ullman, advancing with the deadly drug in his hand, did not in that first moment realize what Mark was trying to do.

Mark's toe touched the starting switch. He pressed it in convulsively. And with a sudden loud roar from its atom tubes, the cruiser lurched violently off the ground.

The little ship gave but one convulsive leap and then hit the ground again with a jarring impact, as Mark withdrew his toe. That impact rolled Ardra off her couch. And it flung Burke Ullman against the wall of the compartment.

For a moment, Mark had a wild hope that his desperate plan had succeeded. But his hope died swiftly. For Ullman had not been stunned by the sudden jolt, as Mark had hoped he would be. The engineer was scrambling to his feet.

His dark face was deadly now in menace. As he had been flung against the wall, the vial in his hand had smashed, and the red liquid it had contained was dripping from his hand along with blood from the cuts made by the cracked glass.

"A neat trick, Raymond," he rasped, "but not neat enough. It did spoil my little plan to put you to sleep, though."

Impatiently, Ullman flung away the dripping red glass fragments in his hand. And the engineer drew the atom-pistol he had taken from Mark.

"I shall have to use this instead of the drug," he snapped. "It is not as satisfying

to me as the living death I had planned for you, but it will do."

Mark closed his eyes as Burke Ullman raised the weapon. He heard Ardra cry out frantically.

"No, Burke—don't kill him! I'll go anywhere with you, do anything you say, if you spare him!"

There was a moment's silence. The destroying, searing flash that Mark awaited did not come.

He opened his eyes. Burke Ullman was swaying on his feet, and a horrible expression had come into the engineer's dark face.

Stupefiedly, Ullman dropped the pistol and stared down at his red-stained hand.

"My hand—getting cold," Ullman whispered. "Cold, and numb—"

And then he shrieked wildly. "The red drug—it was injected into *my* blood when I fell! Those fragments of glass that cut my hand, let the drug enter my blood—"

He tottered around, began wildly to scabble on the floor where he had poured the green antidote.

"The antidote!" he sobbed. "There must be a little left, a few drops—"

But there was nothing on the metal floor but a drying green stain. Burke Ullman clawed at it insanely.

Then his body slowly stiffened. A strange, blank expression came over his face, and his body sagged along the floor and lay still.

Mark looked down at him dazedly. The engineer lay with face and body still, apparently lifeless.

"Caught," Mark whispered hoarsely. "Caught in his own trap. He's in the living death and nothing will ever revive him—he threw away the last of the antidote himself!"

"Mark!" Ardra was sobbing.

"Try to roll toward me, Ardra," he directed in an unsteady voice. "Maybe you can get me free."

The girl, her hands and feet still bound, inched along the floor to him. She reached up and with bound, nerveless hands fumbled at the metal rope that held him to the stanchion.

In a few minutes, Mark felt the rope loosen. He tore it away, cut the girl's bonds, and then for a long moment, held her tight in his arms.

"Ardra!" he whispered thickly. "I thought you dead—lost to me—"

She stirred in his arms. "Mark, let's get away from here, back to earth. Now!"

He looked down at Burke Ullman's sleeping, apparently lifeless form.

"There's no use to take him back to earth," he muttered. "We'll have to leave him here on the moon, with the dead—to sleep forever, as he meant me to sleep."

He donned his space-suit again and car-

ried the limp body outside. There he left Burke Ullman to slumber forever in the deep shadow of the tall crags.

TEN minutes later, the little cruiser rose from the shadows with a roar of atom-tubes. And as it slanted upward from the shadowy, silent world of the dead, as it headed toward the great, warm, silver sphere of earth, Ardra clung to Mark Raymond's side.

"Don't look back, Mark," she shivered. "I don't want ever again even to look at the moon, when I think that for days I lay there amid the dead."

"No, we won't look back," he told her, drawing her closer to him, happiness returning to his tired, haggard face. "You and I, Ardra, for the rest of our lives—we're going to look ahead."

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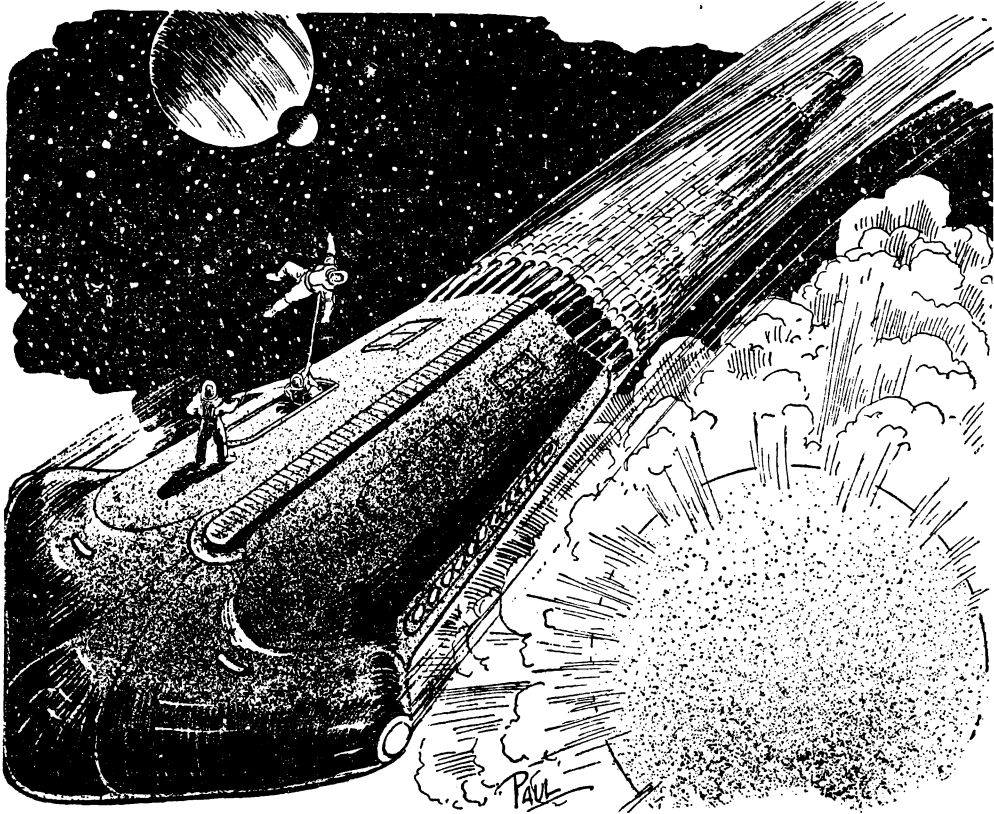
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AFTER DOOMSDAY

by JOHN COTTON

Wolfe Carnac was the Noah of the future, for his little space-ship held the last remnant of humanity—a pitiful hundred souls snatched from a burning world in the grip of an exploding sun! But mutiny threatens to destroy the last hope of the race!



Like a batted ball, the overalled figure rose from the hull.

Stars occasionally burst, expanding enormously, giving out a vast amount of heat, and then dying down again. No one knows why this occurs, but it does seem to happen to stars not at all unlike the sun. If it happened to the sun, the earth would stand about as much chance of survival as a butterfly in a furnace.

—*The Last Judgment* (J. B. S. Haldane).

CHAPTER I

THE LAST HUNDRED

ONLY a single derided scholar of the thirtieth century had foreseen the explosion of the sun—but it was ex-

ploding, like an incandescent bomb more than eight hundred thousand miles in diameter, swelling and spreading into a fiery cloud that grew miles in a second. Within the first ninety minutes after the explosion began, the parched globule that was Mercury had flamed into lava and then vapor. Something more than two hours later Venus disintegrated into a dark, filthy mist. And then it was the turn of Mother Earth, her oceans rising in banks of scalding steam,

her continents churning into shattered flakes, her internal fires gushing out to hasten the destruction of everything over which mankind had fought and toiled and dreamed and prayed . . .

Yet there were human eyes left to see that unthinkable catastrophe. A scant hundred men and women, spared by the fate that was blasting the inner planets to atoms, stared pallidly through the glassite ports of a javelin-shaped rocket craft that sped outward at an angle from the place where Earth had been. Most of them stood motionless, as if stunned or fascinated. But at length one man—towering, stout and red-faced, with rich and flashy rainment—blinked and shook his heavy head as if to break the spell. Pushing backward and clear of the little knot of his fellow-beings around the port, he gazed in evident mystification at the interior of the long, narrow compartment that housed them.

Quickly he judged that he could cross from bulkhead to bulkhead in ten of his great strides, and traverse its length in fifty. Glancing up, he judged the ceiling height at eight feet. Then his eyes sought the floor, or deck, of metal. At his end of the compartment it was covered with a felt carpet and set about with cushioned furniture, like a lounge. The far end was similarly appointed, but the central space, half set off by two pairs of spiral companionways, was occupied by three long metal tables, each with two rows of chairs.

Another man left the group at the ports and approached the big fellow. "This seems to be the salon deck," he ventured softly. "Shall we get acquainted? I'm Professor Scaife."

"And I'm Saul Ruger." The huge red hand shook Professor Scaife's lean, dark one, while the canny pig-eyes in the great face studied the new acquaintance's thin body, hollow cheeks, bald head and large, lustrous eyes. "Professor, you said?"

"Ex-professor," smiled Scaife ruefully. "I was discharged from—oh, well, why con-

sider it now? The university's gone, with the rest of the world we knew. My wife and I were broke, and came abroad when the invitation was broadcast, more for free food and shelter than anything else. Practically everybody else seems to have had the same idea."

The two sat down on a divan.

"At least you know *why* you're here," said Ruger. "I only remember being awfully drunk last night, and following a pretty dancer out of a cafe." He sniggered. "She was shy, but I figured that I could—"

"You must have wandered aboard without knowing it," suggested Scaife. "Lucky for you. This ship got away at midnight, just the right time. Other rocket craft that tried to escape after the explosion started—" he made a sudden erasing gesture. "They must have been too late."

RUGER mopped his flushed brow and looked around the compartment again. "I remember hearing jokes about this craft," he told his companion. "Just what is it?"

"It's named the *Ark of Space*. Appropriate, eh? Built of some secret alloy, very long and narrow, most of its interior is taken up with some atomic fuel supply and the engines. This section isn't more than a fifth of the whole length—comes about two-thirds of the way back, as I judge, like the handgrip on a spear."

Ruger's eyes turned up to the low ceiling. "Is there another deck?"

"Four in all. This is the second from the bottom. Beneath us is the supply hold. Next above us is the cabin deck, with a hundred-odd cabins, each five feet by seven. And above that is the control level. Forward are laboratories and a garden under artificial lights."

The sound of the two voices attracted others from the ports, and several sought seats nearby. Ruger, who liked an audience, became more voluble.

"I've been a gambler all my life," he

bragged. "One of the real sports of the Thirteenth Century, I guess. Stock markets, cards, races, all that—but this was the luckiest break I ever had. To stagger aboard this haven of refuge dead drunk, escaping when sober men went up in smoke! If I could only find the girl I was chasing—" He shrugged in resignation. "Well, I can't have everything. Say, Professor, where are we headed?"

Scaife shook his head. "Nobody seems to know."

"Mars?" someone suggested.

"Hardly," replied Scaife. "This explosion must be on the point of finishing Mars along with the other inner planets. We're past that stop, anyway. Even Jupiter will probably be too hot to support life, and Saturn will be more than tropical."

"That brings up Uranus," put in Ruger.

"And that may be our destination," added Scaife. "With this increased light and heat, Uranus should be habitable."

The professor's wife approached. She was a young brunette, attractive in a voluptuous, sultry fashion. "How will we get to Uranus?" she demanded. "No expedition has ever gone beyond Jupiter's moons."

"We must get there, Lille," answered Scaife grimly.

"Yes," chimed in Ruger again, smirking appreciatively at the woman. "We can't go back to where we started, you know."

Several hearers laughed, and the big man expanded at this tribute to his wit. "Who's the skipper of this craft?" he asked.

Nobody could tell him, though one or two remembered hearing the name in news-casts.

"Well, let's interview him," said Ruger. "We're his responsibilities and he should be glad to inform us of—" He broke short off, then crowed delightedly. "Hey, look who's here!"

His roving pig-eyes had caught a figure just turning from a port across the compartment—a slender, feminine figure.

"Say, Professor," he chuckled to Scaife, "yonder's the pullet I followed aboard. It's going to be a nice little trip after all!"

He rose, huge and jovial. The slender girl saw and recognized him. Her violet eyes widened, her oval face grew a shade paler, and one hand lifted nervously to her mane of dark hair. Ruger, his greedy smile widening, took a step in her direction.

"Attention!"

The new voice was clear and commanding as a gong. Every person on the deck—Scaife on the divan, his companions in nearby chairs, Ruger on the point of resuming his gallant pursuit, the worried girl who was his quarry, the groups at the ports along either side—all turned to look.

A spare, fit-looking man, almost as tall as Ruger, had just descended one of the companionways. Behind him came half a dozen more, who quickly ranged themselves behind him.

"Attention!" called the leader again. "Assemble here, all of you. I'm Dr. Wolfe Carnac, the commander of this vessel, and I'm here to tell you what to expect of me and what I'll expect of you."

CHAPTER II

A MODERN NOAH

RAPIDLY, the hundred passengers gathered, dropping upon chairs and divans, perching on sills, kneeling or squatting on the carpet. Gathered close together, they looked even fewer—a very tiny knot of humanity to represent their lost planet. Many of them were shabbily dressed and only a few prepossessing. Their faces reflected all things—stupidity, shrewdness, distrust, eagerness, mystification. Every pair of eyes was fixed upon the tall man who had summoned them.

He wore the uniform of a space-captain, with braid and insignia removed. His booted feet were set wide apart, his nervous, corded hands were hooked by their

thumbs in his belt. His head, riding high on the upright collar of his black blouse, was the head of a commander and a thinker. Its tawny, backward-brushed hair bore a stripe of gray up the middle and silvery patches at either temple. The moustache that rose in a point on either side of his nose's proud curve was almost black. His chin thrust forward like the prow of a boat, seeming to point the way for his steel-colored eyes.

He waited for the commotion to die down.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began at length, "it is my intention that we understand each other as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.

"I seem to have foreseen the explosion of the sun and its results, and to have been alone in that foresight. Some of you may have read the entertaining articles and heard the humorous newscasts that discounted my theory. You may also remember the merriment that rose over the building, at my own expense, of this space-ark in which we now escape destruction."

His clear voice grew a trifle sad. "I spent ten years and all my money in finishing it. Then I invited one hundred persons, choosing from among the most brilliant thinkers on the inner planets, to come with me to a less dangerous part of the universe."

Dr. Wolfe Carnac's wide mouth curved in a mirthless grin. "I found one of that hundred willing to listen to me. He is my second in command. Meet Wynn Keogh."

One hand gestured a man forward from the group at his elbow. Wynn Keogh was youngish, chubby, blond with knowing eyes. Some of the hearers had known of his fame as a biologist.

"I turned then to a less famous but more open-minded class, the brilliant but obscure students of science," went on Carnac. "Instead of ninety-nine converts, I won four." Again he gestured in introduction. "Dr. Uffer, who will act as our surgeon; Forrest Lord, geologist; Ralf Manheim, chemist; Esau Quillan, astronomer."

Four bashful-looking young men bowed. Again Carnac spoke:

"And three days ago, desperate in my desire to rescue some handful of my fellow-beings, I announced publicly that I would take aboard any fifty men and fifty women, asking only that they be healthy and under forty-five years of age. The free meals I offered attracted some of you, I believe. The last man and woman came aboard at 12 o'clock, midnight, New York time, yesterday. And we left Earth immediately, just four hours before the explosion began. So much for our pre-flight history. Now let me make myself clear on our present position."

His voice took on a semi-military rasp.

"First of all, I am the commander of this craft and of all who expect to remain upon it. My orders will be final and unquestioned. Is that clear?"

A murmur arose, which Professor Scaife, standing up, made bold to put into words. "We recognize your authority, sir," he ventured, "but what are we to do?"

"You'll have plenty to do," replied Carnac readily. "Inasmuch as you are to be the ancestors of a new race, you must maintain good health. You will rise, retire and go to meals—twice a day—upon the sounding of a gong. On the fourth level is a small but excellent gymnasium. In classes of twenty each, you will exercise an hour daily. Each person must also circle the fourth-level promenade eighteen times continuously each day, a walk that approximates a mile. Once a week you will report to the surgeon for physical examination." He paused, listening to a quick whisper from Wynn Keogh. "Yes, and there will be work details, in which you will all share—laundry, sweeping, kitchen police, laboratory and garden assistance, and so on. These duties need occupy only a small part of your time."

"Will we have amusements?" boomed the giant Saul Ruger.

"Not many, I'm afraid," was Carnac's

answer. "I suggest a revival of the nearly-forgotten art of intelligent and diverting conversation. There are also cards and other games, and a limited supply of books—"

Cries interrupted him, cries of astonishment at the mention of so ancient a form of entertainment.

"I said books, and it would do you good to read a bit," said Carnac firmly. "Even if we could spare the power to operate a television set, there are no broadcasting stations left. Ladies and gentlemen, this ship is your world, and you its only inhabitants! Adjust yourselves to that condition."

"Dr. Carnac!" It was Lille Scaife this time, rising from beside her husband. "Where are we going?"

"We shall attempt settlement upon a planet in the system of Alpha Centauri," was his quick response, and louder cries of amazement greeted him. He held up his hand for silence.

"It may seem a novel solution to our problem, but it is our only one," he insisted, a little harshly. "We are provisioned for some six years—"

Still more cries drowned his voice.

"Six years! Isn't Alpha Centauri about four light-years away?"

"We'd be going almost as fast as light!"

"What about fuel?"

"And acceleration and deceleration?"

Carnac's voice rose to dominate the clamor once more. "We will approach the speed of light," he announced, "allowing for a year to accelerate and another to decelerate."

Professor Scaife spoke again, before the din could rise. "May I challenge that idea, Doctor? Wouldn't so great a speed be injurious to the ship and its contents?"

Carnac shook his head. "We'll be safe at anything up to the ultimate speed of more than 180,000 miles a second. Earth, in revolving upon its axis and circling the sun, had a speed of some 150 miles a second.

In turn the sun, or what is left of it, moves around another point in the universe, which undoubtedly revolves around yet another, and so on. The aggregate of all these speeds quite conceivably approximates that of light—"

He stilled more commotion with an imperious gesture. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have pointed out that I am the commander and that my orders and decisions are to be accepted without question or hesitation."

"Wait!" Saul Ruger surged to his feet, his face glowing above his great shoulders like a sunrise over a mountain. "Mr. Scaife here made a suggestion just before you showed up, Dr. Carnac. Uranus is closer, and probably habitable with all this extra sun. Why not—"

"No," interrupted Carnac unceremoniously. "The increased light and heat will plunge Uranus and the other outer planets into cataclysmic change cycles. If we are emigrating to a new world, we want one with a fixed and seasoned mode of existence. It will be quite hard enough to adapt ourselves to such a mode without meeting ever new changes."

"But are Alpha Centauri's planets habitable?" persisted Ruger. "I didn't think even the best telescopes could tell us that."

"Our own sun had three habitable planets—Venus, Earth and Mars," said Carnac patiently. "This does not include Jupiter's moons, which would have been settled ultimately but for this catastrophe which is even now turning them into a bundle of burnt-out Mercuries. Alpha Centauri has at least fifteen planets, perhaps more. Chances of a habitable world among them are more than good."

He paused. Ruger started to say something else, thought better of it and sat down.

"I will now be arbitrary and declare these remarks at an end," Carnac finished. "Further questions must go through administrative channels which we will set up as soon as convenient. Good-day."

The meeting broke up, everybody chatter-

ing at once. Carnac, turning to mount the companionway again, paused as a hand touched his sleeve. He turned to see a slender girl, her beautiful oval face touched with a smile that enhanced the deep violet of her eyes.

"Dr. Carnac," she said hesitantly, "I'm Elwa Zain. I wanted to say that you mustn't think we're all suspicious or ungrateful. I came aboard by mistake, but I want to thank you for saving my life. I'll obey any order you give."

Carnac's gray eyes were not exactly hard, but they grew dull and troubled.

"Up to now I felt that things would move smoothly on this flight," he said gently. "But with beautiful women to complicate matters!—"

He moved on up the companionway without finishing.

CHAPTER III

RUMBLINGS

THE aft quarter of the upper deck was partitioned off and fitted up as control room and commander's headquarters. Nearest the door and on either side of it were the control boards with their rows of rocket-control keys, dials and gauges, a stand with space-charts and logarithm tables, and the desk which held the log book and other records. Behind these were two bunks and lockers, one at either wall, for Carnac and Keogh. The back of the compartment was filled with racks in which rested weapons—rust-ray throwers, electro-automatic rifles and pistols, ray-sabers, bombs and canisters of ammunition. On the walls hung a dozen space-overall outfits.

Keogh and Carnac sat side by side at the controls, the vital commander reading a series of formulas from a scribbled sheet while his plump subordinate touched combination after combination of keys. Finally Carnac laid aside the paper.

"We're accelerating at the highest rate

of speed compatible with comfort right now," he pronounced. "How are we for direction?"

"Dead on, sir," replied Keogh, his blond head bending above the gauges.

"Good." Carnac was silent for a moment, musing. Then, "Keogh, I was almost broken-hearted when we first shipped our passengers. They looked like the lowest of spindrift scum, the poorest of building material for a new race. But I find some good types among them, especially the younger ones."

"One fine looking woman," muttered Keogh, his face canny as a Buddha's. "That professor's wife—"

"Careful, lad," warned Carnac. "Better leave other men's wives alone."

Keogh nodded, but said nothing. A buzzer sounded and Carnac touched a button. A small screen lighted up on the table-top before him, revealing the image of Ralf Manheim's brown, half-Mongolian face.

"Yes, Manheim, what is it?" prompted Carnac.

"Delegation of passengers, sir," came the brisk voice of the lieutenant. "They want to speak to you."

"Might as well see them," said Carnac. "Send them in."

The reflected face snapped out of sight. A moment later the metal door swung open and the huge bulk of Ruger strode through. Behind him came the cricket-like Scaife, then a squat, powerful-looking fellow whose bashed-in face and crumpled ears bespoke the professional bruiser.

"Yes?" Carnac said expectantly.

"I'm Saul Ruger, Captain," said the big man. "This is Professor Scaife, who spoke to you in the meeting yesterday. And this," indicating the third visitor, "is Jor Wight. We've been chosen by a group of the passengers to talk to you."

"Then talk," granted Carnac, but Scaife looked hesitantly at Keogh. Carnac saw. "You may go, Keogh," he ordered, and the second in command rose and walked out.

The three spokesmen moved slowly forward, ranging themselves around Carnac's chair. He gazed at them, watchfully but tranquilly. Again Ruger spoke:

"Captain Carnac, we're willing to fit into the scheme of things. Even to sleep in those little five-by-seven cubbies—"

"My bed occupies less room than that," pointed out Carnac, nodding at his narrow bunk.

"As I say, it isn't that," continued Ruger. "It's that we'd like a voice in—" He hesitated, a bit daunted by Carnac's level gray stare.

"Voice in what?" urged the commander bleakly.

"In the administration of this ship," supplied Scaife.

"Yeh," grunted the brute-faced Jor Wight. "We want a say in things."

"Sorry, gentlemen," said Carnac. "I have already announced that I am the sole commander. I have always meant exactly what I said."

"Hey!" Jor Wight snarled. "What's the idea, pulling that stuff on free, red-blooded—"

"That will be enough," broke in Carnac. "Suggestions I'll listen to. But demands for a voice in operating this ship or otherwise conducting the expedition are out of order. Good-day."

"Is this final?" Ruger almost growled, but Carnac did not deign an answer. The three turned and walked stiffly out.

Again studying the dials and gauges, Carnac opened a notebook and, consulting tables of figures, began to select and jot down new formulas for the next stage of the flight. In the middle of his work, he turned to a vision screen and switched on the power. It showed him the back track of his ship as in a mirror, and an immense, fire-furred globe of white-hot gas that was the many times swollen sun almost filled the rectangle of the screen. He made a brief checkup. Yes, Mars was doomed. Though outside the range of the explosion

itself, the Red Planet was crumbling in the heat. Carnac's hard lips twitched a little, as if in pain at the spectacle.

"Captain! Dr. Carnac!"

HE turned at the voice. Wynn Keogh had returned, and with him was a dark woman of bold, healthy beauty.

"I'm Lille Scaife," she announced. "Mr. Keogh and I have been talking."

"Yes, very profitably," supplemented Keogh, bridling a bit as he glanced at his handsome companion.

"You received a passengers' delegation just now, Dr. Carnac?" continued Lille Scaife. "And they seemed rebellious as they left?" She smiled triumphantly. "I'm well informed, you see."

"I see," he agreed rather colorlessly.

"Perhaps, sir, you and Mr. Keogh," she gave the second in command a sudden eloquent glance, "would like a spy system, to operate among the passengers. It would be valuable in many ways."

"Mrs. Scaife," said Carnac, "when I need a spy system I shall form it myself."

"But Mr. Keogh agreed—"

"Keogh, remember what I advised you a while ago?" Carnac's eyes raked his subordinate. "About something that's best left alone?" His voice grew insistent. "Do you remember, I say?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Keogh.

Lille Scaife had slipped out again, without so much as a farewell. Carnac looked at his subordinate more kindly.

"Better not start any marital disharmonies," he said.

Keogh changed the subject. "There's another passenger outside to see you. A girl. Shall I send her in?"

"Yes, I'll make a clean sweep of these early-voyage visits."

Keogh followed Lille Scaife out, holding the door for Elwa Zain to enter. Left alone with the newcomer, Carnac frowned a little. It frightened her, and the words on her lips died.

"You're Miss Zain?" queried Carnac. "Perhaps I owe you an apology for my shortness yesterday."

"It was about that very matter that I came," she managed, encouraged by his apparent relenting. "I was afraid that I'd given offense in some way."

He shook his head. "No, I meant what I said. A handsome woman will cause trouble in so small and cramped a group, and there are at least two handsome specimen—yourself and Professor Scaife's wife. There, that's as much of an explanation as I ever give for my arbitrary remarks."

"You think Mrs. Scaife is handsome?" she said, then went on without waiting for reply. "Dr. Carnac—or Captain Carnac, if I should call you that—I came aboard by accident. I was a professional dancer, and on the last night of Earth I was annoyed as I left the stage of the cafe where I worked. When I started home, he followed. I fled here—and so, I find, did he. May I ask for protection?"

"Has he bothered you?"

"No, but—"

"Then wait until he does," interrupted Carnac, even more brusquely than usual. Sitting, he studied his gauges yet again, struck a key or two on the control-board, judged the change in position and speed. "May I be left alone now?"

She mumbled something and left. Carnac's frown deepened. He did not want to be moved, especially after his recent lecture to Keogh; yet he felt an interest in woman-kind for the first time since he had begun work on his *Arc of Space* a decade before. He sighed over the controls. After all, why should he be so austere? He was only in his early thirties. Maybe, when the trip was well begun . . .

"Doc!"

He swung around in his chair. Jor Wight was back in the room, his battered face twisted into a fighting grimace.

"I slipped in when that Zain girl left," he volunteered in a snarling voice. "Say, you

talked mighty high when the delegation was here. I didn't like it, see?" He moved a tense step nearer. "And do you know what I do when guys talk high to me?"

"Get out of here," ordered Carnac.

"How would you like a punch in the eye?" A knotted fist raised.

"Get out," repeated the commander. One hand flipped open a drawer in the metal table, then the hand stole in and emerged with a small rust-ray thrower. Jor Wight saw it and paused in his advance.

"You wouldn't burn me," he protested.

"I will unless you're gone before I count three. One, two—"

Jor Wight's exit was the swiftest of the entire day.

Carnac relaxed, thrusting out his booted feet. In an hour's time he had antagonized a delegation of his passengers, discovered a dangerous weak spot in his chief subordinate's makeup, gone far toward offending a girl he liked, and repelled a threatened attack at point of a weapon. Who said space voyages were boring?

His eyes, quartering the floor, glimpsed a folded bit of paper almost at his feet. Stooping, he picked it up, smoothed it out. It bore three words.

Carnac's face hardened as he read them:

URANUS OR NOTHING

It was a warning. Somebody had dropped it there for him to pick up.

Who?

CHAPTER IV

THE STRUGGLE IN SPACE

FROM the outside, the *Ark of Space* looked as Scaife had described it to Ruger, a metal spear. Four hundred yards long and twelve yards in diameter, it tapered to a point at the bow. The front half and more of the cylindrical hull was filled with fuel mixture, kept liquid by high pressure. Then came a twenty-five-yard section divided into two levels within—the

lower for a garden under artificial lights, the upper fitted with pens for animals to aid in the hoped-for colonization, and also containing a laboratory compartment for the air-freshening apparatus and other scientific necessities. Behind this—the hand-grip of the spear, Scaife had dubbed it—was the fifty-yard section occupied by the passengers and the controls. The final hundred yards was taken up with the rocket motor, and from its rear jets gushed a constant flame, like a fiery plume to guide the great javelin in his flight.

Dr. Wolfe Carnac, quitting the interior through a lock-panel in the control chamber, stood erect on the outer plating. His spare body was swaddled in an insulated space-overall, his head protected by a casque of clouded glassite, his hands muffled in elbow-length space-mittens, his feet strapped into boots with magnetized soles. With a slender, cane-like rod of steel, he began to tap the hull. His practiced hand felt a reassuringly solid vibration—apparently the speedy journey through Earth's atmosphere had not damaged the craft's integument in the least.

Moving forward, he tapped his way along, meanwhile glancing to right and left. The star-spattered gloom of airless space surrounded him save for the swollen patch of light behind, where the exploded sun hung. Measuring his craft with his eye, Carnac thought of the same spear-simile that Scaife had employed. Then, with a slight grin, he visualized himself as a very small wizard riding upon a very large broomstick, tipped with a sheaf of fire instead of a bundle of straw. Or, as he moved cautiously forward on magnetized shoes, he might be compared to a mouse running along a length of drain-pipe. Tap, tap, spoke his rod upon the gray curve of the hull. He noted a slight opening between two plates, tried to probe it with the pointed end of his tool.

What was that new vibration?

It shook the sensitive rod which he held pressed against the plates—an impact, an-

other and another—footsteps, stealthy and close at hand.

Carnac glanced quickly around. He stood alone on the hull. But what was beneath him—that is, on the opposite side of the narrow metal cylinder? A man in space-armor and magnetized boots could cling there as easily as he clung here.

He took a step or two sideways, coming in view of a new quarter of the hull's circumference. A figure popped into sight, helmeted and overalled as he was. Another glassite-masked head appeared behind the first, staring up at Carnac around the curve of metal. Next instant the two had thrown themselves at him.

As quickly as though he were in gymnasium trunks instead of space-armor, Carnac fell into a position of defense. His bar defended him like a sword. He was just in time to ward off a blow struck by a bludgeon in the hands of his foremost assailant—a bludgeon that looked like a hoe-handle from the garden compartment.

The stroke spent itself on the steel bar, and Carnac disengaged his own weapon and lashed out with it. He struck the man's helmet, but the rod was too slight to break the tough glassite. The second man was closing in on his flank, and Carnac broke ground warily toward the stern of the ship.

The fellow with the club moved confidently to attack again, while his companion tried to circle wide, lifting a pistol-like something in his gloved fist. Carnac's heart chilled—a rust-ray, perhaps stolen from his own arsenal! By happy chance, he ducked low just as the weapon spouted a narrow beam of light. He heard a momentary roar as it grazed his helmet, then without straightening, he charged the man with the club. His bar, darting out, struck not at the body, but at the feet. Square across the metal toes of the boots he smashed home, then whirled the rod up saberwise to strike and hoist the fellow under the armpit.

Like a batted ball, the overalled figure

rose from the hull, rose higher and higher. Carnac felt a surge of savage triumph within his muscles. As he had hoped, his blow on the feet had jammed the magnetic units of the shoes, so that the man weighed no more than a feather on the gravityless exterior of the hull. Helplessly struggling, the would-be assassin floated farther and farther away toward the rear of the craft. In a moment, the jet of the rocket engines would singe him into nothingness. Carnac turned toward his remaining attacker.

That worthy, clumsily fingering the ray-thrower in his heavy mitten, took careful aim. Carnac threw his bar in a desperate attempt to strike down the muzzle. It missed. Again came the pencil-thin gush of the ray's flame. Carnac felt it ripple the side of his overall. An instant later he swayed, light-headed. His air supply was escaping through the scorched hole.

Another spurt of the ray would surely be the end of Carnac, but the other's weapon seemed to droop, and then he was dashing hurriedly down under the hull. What had frightened him? Carnac glanced backward. Somebody had appeared on the plating toward the stern, somebody hurrying up with an electro-automatic rifle.

Carnac started toward his rescuer, one mitten trying to stanch the escaping air. He seemed fragile, ready to float away like the enemy he had knocked loose from the ship a moment ago. All but his feet, that is—they weighed tons inside his shoes. He took a step, another and another. What was the matter with his glassite helmet? It was all very well for it to be clouded slightly against the glare of light in space, but this—he noticed for the first time—was too dark entirely. He must complain to the manufacturers. No, silly . . . the manufacturers had been disintegrated, and their factories with them. Now the clouding was opaque . . . his ears rang . . . this was the end, and a silly end it was, for one who had outwitted fate and escaped the destruction of four worlds. . . .

CHAPTER V ULTIMATUM

CONSCIOUSNESS returned laggingly to Wolfe Carnac, as though it were not quite sure of the way back. First he was aware of a swishing hum at the center of his brain, like a dynamo off key, then a faint groan. He recognized the voice that groaned. It was his.

After that he saw darkness, where a moment before he had seen nothing. His eyes were closed, as though heavy coins weighted the lids. Was he dead? No, for never did corpse know this tingling of hands, feet and lips—this twisting of nerve centers. He groaned again and opened his eyes.

He was lying on his own bunk in the control room, and between his eyes and the curved metal ceiling he made out the anxious faces of Keogh and Elwa Zain, so distorted to his dizzy vision that their looks of consternation seemed ludicrous. Carnac laughed, albeit feebly, rose to a sitting posture and rocked his head like a stunned boxer.

"Thank God you're all right!" gasped Keogh. "If it hadn't been for Miss Zain here—"

"Miss Zain?" said Carnac, his head clearing and strength flowing back to his limbs. "I thought I collapsed outside, with the air gone from my suit."

"That's right," nodded Keogh. "Miss Zain it was who went out there and dragged you in."

"On impulse," added the girl. "I had heard murmurings—hard to run down, I know, but disquieting—against you. I thought to come and warn you, but you had already gone out in your space-suit."

"Then why not tell Mr. Keogh?" suggested Carnac, with a bleakness that he himself found hard to explain.

"Nobody answered my bell at the control-room door," she explained. "I made bold to—push in." She seemed to fear disapproval. "Mr. Keogh wasn't there,

and I saw at once that you were in danger.”

“How did you diagnose that?” Carnac almost cried.

“By the fact that three hooks on your space-overall rack were empty,” she replied. “I knew that Mr. Keogh wouldn’t be outside at the same time you were—”

“He should have been at the controls,” interrupted Carnac, and Keogh flushed in embarrassment.

“Your other lieutenants — Uffer, Mannheim, Lord and Quillan—I had seen, every one, just a few moments before.” Her expression betrayed something of triumph. “Therefore, one of the three missing suits was yours, while the others were undoubtedly borrowed by trouble-makers.”

“Who had entered unbidden in Keogh’s absence, as you had,” supplied Carnac.

Keogh mopped his plump face. “I’m sorry,” he began, but Carnac waved him to silence, his eyes on Elwa.

“Therefore,” he resumed for her, “you took the job of rescue upon yourself?”

“I had not time to call help,” she said, almost apologetically. “I grabbed a fourth suit, put it on, caught up a rifle, and slipped out by a lock panel. You know the rest.”

“Thank you, Miss Zain,” said Carnac. “I owe you my life. It’s too bad that I had to be rescued by an officious passenger.”

Her face grew suddenly pained and she tossed her mane of dark hair. Carnac rose, almost completely revived, and spoke to Keogh.

“What about the two men outside?”

“The one knocked loose from the hull was apparently destroyed as he drifted into the rocket blasts,” was the reply. “I suppose the other is still at large out there.”

“Order Mannheim and Lord into space-overalls, give them rifles, and send them to arrest him,” snapped Carnac. “Warn them that he has a rust-ray. Then gather the passengers on the salon deck. I’ll speak to them.”

Keogh saluted and left, apparently glad to escape his chief’s accusing eyes. Elwa

hung back a moment at the very threshold.

“Dr. Carnac,” she ventured, “you act almost sorry that you’re alive.”

He softened a bit. “Forgive me if I was harsh. I hope *you* aren’t sorry.” Then he was silent; Elwa was gone.

Crossing to the controls, he checked gauges and dials automatically. In the back of his head, fierce thoughts squabbled.

He had been rude. After all, it was a slight breach of discipline that she had committed. Hadn’t she more than atoned by her wisdom and courage in saving him? How could he explain, to her and himself, his bad manners?

“A short while ago you were telling yourself you were young,” he taunted himself savagely. “Now you’ve joined the old crochet class, and at the same time you’re a childish idiot. Afraid you’d be swelled by Elwa Zain’s good looks; you’ve treated her shabbily.”

He scowled for some minutes, then a buzzer sounded. He flicked on the vision-screen power and saw the well-nourished image of Wynn Keogh.

“Passengers ready to hear you, sir,” said his subordinate’s voice.

Carnac called Quillan to take the controls, descended the companionway to the cabin deck below, then to the salon deck. Sitting in a group, the passengers watched him expectantly. As at the first meeting he had called, the hundred men and women seemed a pitifully small knot of survivors.

Standing before them, the commander let his eyes flit from one face to another. Side by side sat the bald, shrewd Professor Scaife and his voluptuous wife Lille, with beyond them the huge form of Ruger and, still farther back, Jor Wight, the broken-faced fighter. Carnac was somehow surprised to see these leaders of dissension all here. Who were the two who had attacked him outside, one of them now ashes in space, the other being hunted by Mannheim and Lord?

“Ladies and gentlemen,” began Carnac,

"at the beginning of this voyage I announced the objective as the system of Alpha Centauri, and explained why I felt that no nearer world was satisfactory. However, I cannot longer ignore the seeming determination of a faction here present to land on Uranus instead. Shall I again set forth my arguments against such a move?"

"No necessity," spoke up Scaife at once.

"No," chimed in Ruger's growl. "We remember everything you said."

"Very good," rejoined Carnac. "I give in. Those of you who wish to disembark and attempt a settlement on Uranus may do so."

A cry of joy went up and the hearers surged to their feet, their voices swelling into a cheer that vibrated the solid metal bulkheads. Carnac, gazing at the suddenly jubilant faces, felt a pang. Not one of them, not one believed in his argument for a further but safer destination. Not one! Then his eye sought the face of Elwa Zain, at the very rear of the gathering. Her expression was not of joy, but of enigma. What did she think?

Scaife was pushing forward toward Carnac.

"Thanks, Doctor," he was crying, while waving for silence. "I wish to thank you on behalf of the passengers."

"No thanks, please," Carnac demurred. "It was definite pressure that brought about this decision."

"But we're grateful," insisted the professor. "Uranus, I say again, will be a hospitable world. With determination, energy and a few supplies—"

"Who said anything about supplies?" snapped Carnac, and sudden shocked silence fell. Into the commander's eyes dawned grim mockery.

"I offered to land upon Uranus any persons who wished it," he said. "I meant just that. We shall enter the atmospheric envelope of the planet, descend close enough to drop all malcontents by parachute. But not an ounce of supplies shall be unloaded!"

CHAPTER VI

PRELUDE TO MUTINY

OVER the roar and commotion of a hundred throats rose the clear, authoritative voice of Carnac.

"Silence!" he thundered, and again his hearers let their protests die half spoken.

"I'm not a despot or a fool," he blazed. "I explained once that Uranus is in the grip of a change cycle, through which men can hardly exist. Some of you think otherwise—think it to the extent of trying to kill me." His eyes, gray and hard as gunmuzzles, raked back and forth across the press of men and women, and no gaze was steady enough to meet them.

"I'm tired of bickering! Those who wish to leave may do so, but I'll give no supplies to you. By heaven, I'll save what I can of humanity's remnant, and if this is the only way I can stimulate you into a reasoning condition—"

"Hold on!" bawled a challenger. Jor Wight shouldered his way into the excited front rank. His own eyes flared threateningly.

"Big words won't do no more," he spat. "You ain't our daddy, Doc. If you don't do what we want—why, we'll make you!"

"That's the talk!" shouted someone else. Was it Saul Ruger? The big ex-gambler was watching Wight, but did not move forward to his support.

Carnac faced the bruiser, glad of a single person to treat with. "Wight," he said, "I've never feared your sort yet. Get back."

"You bully!" It was the voice of Elwa Zain. She skirted the little crowd to stand beside Wight, and it was Carnac she accused.

"Because you saved us, must you trample on us?" she demanded heatedly. "Haven't I, at least, shown that rescue works both ways? I paid my debt to you an hour ago."

"Don't presume on that fact, Miss Zain," warned Carnac.

The disfigured face of Wight grew crim-

son and his anger exploded like a bomb.

"You can't talk like that to no woman!" he cried. "Not while I'm here!"

Clenching his fists, he moved forward as if to strike.

At the same moment a sharp, abrupt snap sounded at Carnac's elbow, the stick-breaking report of an electro-automatic pistol. Jor Wight slammed down upon his face and lay still. Wynn Keogh moved to a position beside his chief, pistol still poised. The excited throng gave back.

"There'll be no mutiny!" trumpeted Keogh.

"Get upstairs to the cabin deck!" called Carnac. "Every man and woman to your cabins, and remain inside until you hear an assembly bell!"

For a moment, there was hesitation, then some timid spirits moved toward the companionways. The others followed. Carnac watched them go, one by one. Finally, as the din of departure sank away, he spoke to Keogh.

"Was killing Wight necessary?"

"Afraid so, sir. If not now, later."

Uffer, the surgeon, materialized from somewhere to stoop and examine the fallen figure.

"Dead as a log," he pronounced. "Shall we get rid of him?"

"Yes, out through a lock-panel," nodded Carnac. "Burial in space. And there are so few left to carry on the race—it's a pity."

"Yes, a pity!"

Elwa Zain moved forward. She had hung back as the crowd had left, and now she faced Carnac sternly above Wight's corpse.

"We're responsible for this death, aren't we, Dr. Carnac?" she said with a bitter smile. "He, moved by my quarrel with you, offered violence. Mr. Keogh, fearing for your safety, shot him down."

Carnac shook his head at her. "I don't know just what condemnation your emotional feminine logic is trying to visit upon

me, but I, as commander, have neither time nor inclination to listen."

"I'm an enemy, then?" she flung out, her pretty mouth curling in scorn.

"If you don't go to your cabin," he told her, "I'll arrest you."

She moved stiffly toward a companionway. Carnac watched her go, his grim expression touched by something like unhappiness. Keogh's voice recalled his superior's attention to a former problem.

"Here's Manheim and Lord back, sir."

The two lieutenants, unhelmeted but still in their space-overalls, came to salute. Their eyes widened as they caught sight of the dead man on the deck.

"Trouble, Dr. Carnac?" inquired Manheim.

"A bit. What about your job?"

Lord made the report. "We found nobody outside, sir. He must have sneaked back in before we went out."

"Too bad. If we'd captured him, he might have confessed who sent him out there to kill me." The commander brooded. "Well, probably we'll know soon enough. Keogh!"

"Sir?" responded the second-in-command.

"How long to Uranus?"

"At our present acceleration, about ten days."

"That's time enough for everything we can possibly do." Carnac's moody tone became crisp and official. "Everybody up to the control room for a conference. Quil-lan is up there now, and you men and he are all I can count on."

"Thanks for trusting us, sir," said Keogh for the group, "but I hope we aren't the only ones. Maybe we can sniff out some of the passengers who will stick by you."

"Maybe," conceded Carnac, "but most of them will just cheer on the faction that seems strongest. I can count only six on our side—six against a hundred." He paused, eyes on Wight's body. "Six against ninety-nine, I should say. Or ninety-eight, since another man was killed outside. I

hope the casualty list doesn't run any higher."

He led the way upward.

CHAPTER VII

REVOLT

"**R**EADY for the concert downstairs, sir."

Carnac looked up at Keogh's words, then laid down the pen with which he had just made the eleventh day's entry in the log book. Swinging around in his chair, he quickly checked the controls.

"Quillan!" he called.

"Sir?" came the ready voice of the young subordinate.

"Take charge while I look in at the entertainment, will you? In a little while somebody will relieve you."

"Right, sir," replied Quillan, sliding into the vacated seat.

Keogh gazed for a moment at the substitute, as if in disapproval. "Wouldn't you rather have me stand by?"

Carnac shook his head. "You've done so much, planning this show, that you're the logical master of ceremonies. I want to see you in that role."

Keogh's round face relaxed in a flattered grin. "I've done nicely at that," he conceded. "I'm proud of my men's chorus especially—Ruger, Scaife, all the others that we thought would be the worst trouble-makers."

"If they're busy entertaining us," said Carnac, "we'll be too far past Uranus for them ever to ask to be set off there."

"Exactly. The show will last three hours, at least—and then we'll be more than a million miles past Uranus."

The two sauntered out of the control room and down the companionway to emerge upon the salon deck. The passengers, seated in lounging groups at either end, applauded their appearance as though there had never been a threat or a dissent-

ing murmur. Carnac smiled, briefly but kindly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he addressed the audience. "The show seems to be Mr. Keogh's. Let him get on with it."

He bowed to his lieutenant amid new applause, then moved to an easy chair and sat down. Keogh bowed in turn, then drew from the bosom of his tunic a folded sheet of paper.

"First, allow me to present Mrs. Scaife, our accompanist," he began, and the professor's exotic wife rose to take a chair in the center space. In her lap she held a valise-like pianolette of outmoded twenty-ninth century make, but apparently in good condition. Her skilful hands touched its many valves, evoking chords of music in flute, brass and string tones.

"And our first number," continued Keogh a little pompously, "will be a dance by Miss Elwa Zain."

He retired to the companionway as, to the accompaniment of Lille Scaife's burst of heady minor melody, the slender figure of the dancer glided into the open.

She wore a long dark cloak which she lifted with outstretched arms, revealing a tight-fitting silver dancing dress that left shoulders and legs bare. Then, in time to the quickening music, she danced—a slim but vigorous flash of motion, now poised on tiptoe with her cloak swishing like spread wings, now swathed, crouching, seeming to shrink and swell in turn, her whole body emanating rhythm to the last trained ounce. Somber grew the music, and Elwa's dance interpreted fear, despair, tragedy. A gay note in the accompaniment, and she was a pirouetting, smiling elf, swirling, swaying and posturing as though perpetual motion had come true in her. Then suddenly it was over—over too soon, with Elwa bowing to the last note as it drowned in applause. She half-ran from the floor, her flushed face smiling with happiness over her own success, and Carnac on impulse waved her to a seat at his side.

"You were worth watching," he told her with genuine warmth.

"You liked it?" she whispered, in almost childlike delight at his praise.

"I did. And I hope that soon—"

"Ladies and gentlemen," Keogh was announcing again, "we now display more of our talent." He paused, as if to gain effect. "It may astound you—most of you, at least," and he smiled briefly at Lille Scaife, as though they shared a joke. "Our men's chorus!"

At his gesture, they rose from the seats where they had lolled in a group—sixteen men, among them the towering, florid Ruger and bald, scrawny Scaife. Ranging themselves in column of twos, they marched into the open space with the smart precision of soldiers.

"Halt!" cried Keogh in a voice of authority, and they obeyed. "Ready!" was his next shout, and half of the chorus faced one way, while the other half faced opposite. Intrigued, the onlookers leaned forward in their seats. Once more Keogh spoke:

"Draw weapons!"

Every man of the sixteen made a quick dip of his right hand into the breast of his jacket. Next instant those sixteen right hands held pistols or rust-rays. Keogh stepped back against the bulkhead so as to command both ends of the salon.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he continued in his announcer's voice, "I wish to announce that we, as the self-appointed saviors of this expedition, are taking command. I wish to warn you that any argument will result in someone getting hurt."

For once in his active and dominating career, Wolfe Carnac was absolutely mute and motionless with amazement. He sat in his chair like a man of wood, his gray eyes wide as they stared at his second-in-command. Keogh's own gaze did not seek him, and Keogh's voice went on:

"I know that not all of you have really worried about where we are going. In fact," and he sounded elated, "the real thinkers

now stand upon this stage. We don't intend to die in unexplored space at Wolfe Carnac's whim—we're going to land on Uranus."

Carnac raised his own voice at last. "You fool!" he roared.

Keogh bowed mockingly. "Found your tongue, Doctor? I'm afraid it won't help you. Never mind quoting the law on mutiny. There aren't any police to invoke. Stand up and surrender."

Pale with rage, Carnac bounded to his feet. His hand whipped to the holster at his side. At least he would finish the career of his lying, traitorous lieutenant—

But even as he cleared the weapon, even as the eight men facing his end of the salon lifted their own pieces, somebody sprang upon him, gripping and tugging at his own arm and wrist. Elwa Zain, surprisingly strong, snatched the electro-automatic from his untightened fingers and fell quickly back out of reach, pointing it at him.

"No you don't!" she warned him. "You're a prisoner!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE RULE OF THE REBELS

FOR a moment, Carnac stood still, his demeanor half tranquil, half stunned.

As a matter of fact, he was diagnosing, scientist-like, his sudden sense of adequacy. He had felt the forlornness of one gun against so many—but, unarmed, he had wits to fight with, and he still felt that his wits were the best on board.

His level gray eyes ignored the girl who had just tricked him and regarded Keogh instead. That worthy smiled.

"I'm glad we didn't have to kill you, Doctor. We need you to land our ship. I realized that even as we attacked you outside ten days ago."

"Then it was you who escaped?" Carnac asked, rather quietly.

"Yes. I failed deliberately, and barely escaped. As I say, I'm glad."

Carnac's teeth bared. "I suppose that I should offer suave congratulations and accept defeat gracefully. But I'm not a good loser, Keogh."

"I don't care what kind of a loser you are," blustered back the leader of the mutiny. "You've lost."

Carnac took a step forward. "Keogh, your position of advantage is only temporary." Another advance. The armed mutineers stood tense, the audience remained cowed and silent.

"Careful!" the ex-subordinate warned him, motioning to his men to cover Carnac. "You saw how quickly Jor Wight died some days ago—how I killed him simply to keep him from blabbing out the revolt plans—"

"You've already admitted the need of me to finish the voyage for you." A third stride toward Keogh.

"Doctor, we mean business. You'll land the ship, as I said."

Elwa Zain spoke suddenly. "Mr. Keogh, hadn't the women better be taken away?"

"That's what I think," seconded Lille Scaife. "If our new commander is going to be pressing with his arguments on this question—"

"Very good," granted Keogh, his eyes probing at Elwa as though to decide how trustworthy she was. "Turn that captured gun over to Mrs. Scaife, Miss Zain," and, as Elwa did so, "then form the ladies into a column of twos and march them up to their cabins."

Lille Scaife and Elwa rapidly did his bidding, then placed themselves at the head of the platoon of women. At Keogh's "March!" the party moved to a companion-way, then up and out of sight.

When they were gone, Keogh's round, proud moon of a face confronted Carnac again.

"Now, Doctor," he bantered, "since we've dismissed the more squeamish half of the audience, shall we go on with the question of whether or not you'll take landing orders from me?"

Carnac was quite close to the mutineers, and he regarded their pointed pistols and rust-rays no more than so many forefingers.

"If you mean torture," he said contemptuously, "that won't work, either. Unless you land within an hour, we'll be too far past Uranus—and at our present speed it would take weeks of expert maneuvering to bring us back."

"Wonders can be performed within an hour," grunted Saul Ruger from his place in the double line of armed men.

Carnac lifted his voice so that all could hear. "Men," he appealed, "this revolt is a minority movement. Can't the rest of you believe me when I say that a landing on Uranus is ill-advised and may be the death of you all? Haven't I already explained that the tremendous changes brought about by the exploded sun's magnificent light and heat are undoubtedly too great for us to meet and adjust?"

"You're right!" yelled back someone from the section of the audience behind him.

"Sure," chimed in a voice from the opposite end of the salon. "Let's back the Doc up!"

But Keogh snapped his fingers as a signal, and the audience subsided before the suddenly levelled guns of the sixteen mutineers.

"That's better," purred Keogh. "Keep your seats and you won't get hurt." He spoke to his nearest confederates. "Ruger, Scaife! Come with me, and bring Carnac with you. You others, stay on guard here. We're going up and take over the control room."

The scrawny professor and the huge gambler fell out of line and took their places on either side of Carnac. Keogh led the way up the steps, past the silent corridors of the cabin deck where none of the women could be seen or heard, on to the top level. Without speaking, the four marched to the door of the control chamber. It was closed.

Keogh, leading, tried the knob. It did not move.

"Locked!" he snapped, then spoke into the microphone on the jamb. "Quillan? Open up."

Silence.

"Open up, I say; it's Keogh."

The speaker box overhead answered:

"We heard you, Mr. Keogh." The quiet tones were Elwa Zain's. "We're in here, all the women. And we won't open up."

Keogh nodded Ruger forward. "Burn the door down with that rust-ray."

"Not so fast," Elwa's hurried warning came. "We've got a hostage. Put that ray to the door, and it will eat through into the body of Lille Scaife, who's spread-eagled against this side!"

"That's true, Wynn," came the gasping assurance of the professor's wife. "They're staging a counter-revolution—they've got me."

Keogh swore. "Let her go!" he bellowed into the microphone. "If you—"

"Whatever you do, she'll have suffered first," Elwa promised him. "Even after that's over, and you're inside, we'll be hard to whip."

"Save me!" wailed Lille Scaife. "Wynn, you said you'd protect me!"

The thin fingers of Scaife clutched Carnac's arm in an agonized grip. His lips mumbled wretchedly:

"Keogh, we can't turn back now. Even if we must sacrifice—"

"No!" quavered the rebel commander. "Lille, darling! Have courage!"

"Wynn," she pleaded. "You'll save me?"

"I swear it," Keogh almost jabbered. "I got into this thing for you, sweetheart. Now—"

Scaife was mumbling again:

"You love my wife, Keogh? And she loves you?"

Suddenly he had moved from beside Carnac, flinging his spider-body upon Keogh, fists flailing.

"Carnac!" he screamed over his shoulder. "Fight for your life! I'll take care of this skunk!"

CHAPTER IX ON TO THE STARS

SCAIFE did not need to urge Carnac. The commander of the expedition had stood quiet and speechless during the parley at the door, but his nerves and muscles had been tensed for a desperate try. Now, even before the jealousy-crazed professor's first blow met Keogh's fat jowls, Carnac had turned upon Ruger.

All the way up from the salon deck, the prisoner had studied this biggest of his guards with critical eyes. The huge Ruger had an overhanging paunch that bespoke softness and poor condition, and into the midst of this, Carnac darted a hard fist. The gambler's scarlet face turned pale and his mouth opened fishlike. Next instant, Carnac had clamped Ruger's weapon hand in both of his and was struggling to possess himself of the rust-ray.

But Ruger, recovering from the wind-breaking blow, summoned his strength to bring the muzzle of the ray into line with the doctor. Carnac writhed aside and then under the weapon, pulling Ruger's arm across his shoulder. With a heave, he threw the heavier man. The sizzling streak of rust-flame impacted on the metal bulkhead with a sound as of ripping tin, left a jagged oxidized trail as it shifted, then abruptly died as Ruger, falling heavily, lost his grip on the weapon. Carnac, dropping a bony knee on his adversary's breast-bone, shifted his hold to the throat.

He was baffled for a moment by the great folds of flesh, and in that moment Ruger's big hands tore open Carnac's collar and gouged painfully at the jugular vein. Releasing his own hold, Carnac sprang up and back to free himself.

He had a momentary glimpse of the other pair of combatants. Like Ruger, Keogh had dropped his weapon and was disarming the feebler Scaife. Then he pinned the professor in a corner by one clutched shoulder, while his other fist belabored the

thin face. This much Carnac saw before Ruger, scrambling up with clumsy swiftness, returned to combat.

It was like the charge of a boar upon a wildcat. Carnac easily sidestepped a floundering rush, pivoting to take his enemy on the flank and sending right and left smashes to ribs and jaw-angle. Ruger reeled but did not collapse, then clutched Carnac's throat again. This time the commander did not fight clear. Instead his own clutch fastened upon Ruger's lapels. One active leg doubled upward, the foot digging into the pit of the gross belly. Next instant Carnac flung himself backward and down, at the same time dragging Ruger's face close to his and hoisting the giant body by straightening the bent leg. The gambler somersaulted in midair and fell with a crash that vibrated the metal deck.

"Well done!" cried the voice of Elwa from the speaker-box overhead. "We saw that in the vision screen!"

The door suddenly flung open. Ruger, shakily trying to rise after his stunning overthrow, gave a snarl and clawed for the fallen rust-ray near him on the deck. An electro-automatic snicked and he melted down like a lump of butter on a griddle.

Elwa, the pistol in her hand, advanced across the threshold. Behind her moved Quillan, a rifle in his hands. Over his shoulder stared the drawn face of Lille Scaife, surrounded by her determined captors.

"Keogh," said Elwa quietly, "let Professor Scaife go. You're through."

Keogh, still pummeling his sweetheart's husband, suddenly released his hold and stepped back, hands raised in submission. "Yes, I'm through," he conceded wearily.

Scaife, staggering and bloody, laughed wildly.

"*You're* through," he yammered, "but I'm not!"

A leap, and he had reached the rust-ray for which Ruger had fumbled as he died.

A scoop of his hand, and he had it. "You stole Lille from me—"

The narrow stream of fire gushed. For a moment the whole upper half of Keogh's body glowed, like a chubby Buddha of red-hot metal. Then the legs beneath it collapsed. Keogh subsided, a mass of clinkered ash from his waist up.

Carnac made two strides toward the professor and wrenched the ray from him. Scaife made no resistance. He contemplated his work with a smile of almost childlike satisfaction upon his battered lips.

"Throw blankets over these bodies," Carnac ordered the watchers at the door. "Quillan, get sleep-gas bombs from the third cabinet at the back. Drop a couple two flights down into that crowd on the salon deck."

He felt weak and unstrung, but straightened himself with a violent jerk. He must keep command until the rebellion was crushed. Quillan darted through the press of women to do Carnac's bidding. Lille Scaife, still guarded by two armed girls, came slowly into the open, cringing under the accusing glare of her betrayed husband. Elwa walked to Carnac's side and placed her hand on his arm.

"I'm glad it came off with no more killing than this," she said gently.

"You knew rebellion was coming?" he demanded.

"Didn't we all know it? With the men plotting and counterplotting, I organized the women. With the exception of Lille Scaife, they were willing to listen to me and follow whatever cue I gave them. That is why, hoping for luck, I disarmed you before you forced your own destruction. Then I came and captured the control room."

"You're a wonder!" he cried, with absolute honesty of admiration.

Quillan was heading down the companionway, with a gas bomb in either hand.

AN HOUR later the fumes had been winnowed from the salon deck, but two-

score figures still sprawled silent in the chairs and on the divans or lay stretched on the floor. Carnac and Elwa were gathering up the pistols and rust-rays dropped by the now-slumbering mutineers in the center of the space. Straightening, they rested for a moment.

Elwa gazed almost tenderly upon the sleepers, her dark robe clutched over her silver dancing costume. "They seem so peaceful now," she mused aloud. "A little while ago they were gun-pointing rebels and frightened captives."

"When they awake," replied Carnac, "we'll be far past Uranus. There'll be no reason for another outbreak, the more because the leaders are all disposed of. I'll hold a court-martial, of course, but there'll be no real need for harsh measures."

Quillan, coming down the companionway, saluted.

"Sir, I've been wondering," he said. "Who'll be second in command in Mr. Keogh's place?"

"Have you a nominee, Quillan?" asked Carnac.

"Well, it seems to me that, what with the way Miss Elwa Zain—" he paused. "Not teaching you your business, sir, but she thought it out so well first and then acted so splendidly when the time was ripe—"

Carnac laughed. "Quillan, you took the words out of my mouth. It isn't often that I permit anyone to do that. Yes, we'd be unwise and ungrateful if we chose anyone else." He faced Elwa. "Well, do you accept your commission?"

She put out a hand, and he clasped it warmly. But neither felt that a handclasp was enough. As if by single impulse, they drew closer together.

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AS IN THE BEGINNING

by JACK WILLIAMSON

Man had done his best to destroy all life, but the world was not quite dead.

THE world was not dead. . . .

Adams knelt in the red, caked mud that the tidal waves had left everywhere. Tears stung his eyes. Reverently, his trembling fingers touched the three translucent spears.

Life still endured. . . .

His misty eyes looked across the red barren flats, toward lonely sea and lifeless sky. Their terror had suddenly fled. These tiny blades of green had banished his despair, and laid the stark horror that had haunted him back from the moon.

They flooded his heart with a quick pity for his prisoner, that dissolved grief and hate and madness. Abruptly he was sorry for the sentence he had passed.

After that vain and frantic search across a world crushed and overwhelmed, when at last he had brought the *Victory* down upon this flat red isle of mud, beside a sea that would never bear ship again, Adams had gone back to his prisoner.

In the rocket's dark interior, hot and stifling with motor fumes, Dr. Everin lay bound in a cramped fuel compartment. He was still in the bulky, insulated suit he had worn on the moon; his features were still concealed behind his grotesque oxygen mask, for the tank was not ventilated.

"Dr. Everin, do you hear?"

The reply was muffled, weary:

"Yes, Adams. We are back on Earth?"

"We are." Hatred turned his voice to steel. "Are you ready to stand trial for what you have done?"

"I'm ready." The tone was serene. "My only crime is duty to my country. No just court will condemn me—"

"I am the court," said Adams, hoarsely. "You are charged before me with the murder of mankind. What have you to say?"

Silence. A faint whisper:

"Murder . . .?"

"I searched the whole Earth," rasped Adams, "before I brought the rocket down. Both Americas are drowned. There is a chain of desolate islands, where the Rockies and the Andes stand above the sea. . . . Africa was swept clean by the tidal waves. . . . Your own Europe is cleft, shattered, lifeless. . . . Asia is a desert of smoking lava: the seas explode upon it into mountains of steam. . . . A new continent has risen east of where Australia sank, a continent of lifeless mud. . . .

"Your atomic weapon did well, Doctor. Murderously well. The radio is still; the seas are empty; I found no sign of man on all the planet.

"We two are the only men alive. And I alone am the court to try you for the murder of your race.—You may speak."

Silence, in the dark tank.

A whisper, faint, incredulous:

"I didn't know. . . . Dead! . . . And we're alone. . . ."

At last, a stricken voice:

"Adams, if you are my sole judge, spare my life. For your sake! Remember, my death will leave you quite alone."

But vengeance had frozen his heart.

"Don't ask for mercy. You have destroyed the humanity in me." His voice rang hard. "I will grant you one hour, Doctor. Then I will unbind you and shoot you through the heart."

Then he had left Everin, and come out through the air-valve upon the plain of mud.

Three blades of grass.

MIRACULOUS life, in the seeds, had endured the hate and fury of war, survived acrid gas and shattering explosive and ray of flame, escaped the final atomic beam from the moon that uprooted mountains and thrust riven continents beneath maddened seas.

War is death, he whispered. And there is ever war of life and death. And life is ever victor.

Three blades. . . . But there would be others; the miracle must happen again. Trees, Adams thought, would grow from the seed of the fruit in his supplies. Somehow, he himself would live. . . .

He was staring at the green mirror of the sea. Its agony had overwhelmed the land; but still it was alive, and the eternal mother of life. A fish leapt, a white shard flashing against the morning sun. Adams's lean face smiled. The world was not dead. . . .

He went striding back toward the *Victory*.

It was a long bright shell, fallen in the mud. Its silver was darkly stained with red oxides.

It was well named, this last desperate achievement of American engineers, that had carried him triumphantly out to capture Everin upon the stark central peaks of Tycho's crater. But what a victory, when one man alone survived it!

The hour was nearly gone. But Adams had warmed to the eternal miracle of life. If the world were not dead, had he been too severe?

A treaty—no better than most treaties—had outlawed atomic force from war. But should Everin be held for his government's crime?

Adams stopped and shut his eyes. Could he himself forgive the loss of home, country, all his world? . . .

The bullet stung his shoulder. Falling, he heard the brittle *spang* from the rocket's air-lock. His eyes flew open to glimpse the bulky figure crouching there.

He was prostrate when the pain came, like a slow red flood. Gasping, he pressed it back from his brain, and sought a way to strike back.

His left hand still lived. It found his gun, dragged it under his coat. He lay still, watching through his eyelashes. Everin would come to him, for he had the keys to controls and stores. If he could hold off death, feigning death, until the man bent to search him. . . .

The oldest game of mankind, he thought dimly, played to the last man. And madder, now, more meaningless, than ever. In the lonely horror of the solitary years to come, the survivor would need the other. But war was ever blind to human need. . . .

He gripped the gun harder. The mounting tropic sun smote him with a giddy violence. Red baked mud and green shimmering sea began to waver and spin. He thirsted for the cool of the sea. The throb of pain was growing dull, but he could feel the trickling blood, hot and sticky, across his throat.

His enemy could stop that blood. . . .

His finger nestled against the trigger. He must be quick. Everin was clever, to have worked out the atomic weapon. Clever, to have escaped. . . .

Adams heard cautious footfalls. Red dust flew abruptly against his eyelids; a gun crashed close behind. But his schooled nerves repressed any start.

He could hear the man's breathing.

Now he will bend over me. When he looks into my face, his heart will be in line. And one flick of my finger will repay me for home, country, my own life. . . .

A cool shadow touched him. *Now!*

But abruptly, instead, he was laughing at the madness of it, at the monstrous jest of all war. Blood couldn't wash out the past. His arm relaxed, and the hidden

gun slid down into the mud.

"Well," his faint voice whispered, "I won't kill you, Everin. Too bad if the last man died by violence. Let's finish . . . at peace. . . ."

A low voice said:

"I am glad. . . . I know now what my father meant. . . ."

ADAMS had closed his eyes; he relaxed in the shadow. He felt deft hands barring the wound. The voice said:

"My father invented the atomic beam to turn the machinery of a peaceful world. When he was commanded to take it to the moon, for a weapon, he drank cyanide. In a note he said: *War is death, and peace is the life of the world.*

"The War Office sent for me. I had been Father's assistant; I thought I understood the beam. For love of my country, I carried it to the moon.

"I know now that I didn't understand it—or father's note. The force escaped my control. And father was right. Peace

means union, common effort. And the life of the world is more than my country—any country—"

The tremulous softness of the voice drew open Adams's eyes.

The oxygen mask was gone, and for the first time he saw Everin's face. It was an oval of pale beauty, framing serene eyes deep as the sky.

He whispered, "A—a woman?"

"I am Dr. Everin's daughter. You might call me—Eve."

When again at last he emerged light-headed from the chaos of pain, there seemed no strangeness in the question:

"Then perhaps this isn't the end—of man?"

Fastening the bandage, she softly breathed:

"No, Adams—or Adam."

And she said:

"We were mad to fight. Nothing is changed, really, since we are alone. But it's so clear, now, what my father meant."

"Peace," he sighed. "And the world lives on. . . ."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of *Future Fiction*, published bi-monthly at Holyoke, Mass., for October 1st, 1939
State of New York
County of New York } ss

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Abner J. Sundell, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of the *Future Fiction* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc., 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.; Editor Chas. D. Hornig, 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.; Business Manager, Abner J. Sundell, 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.

2. That the owner is. (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc., 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.; Lillian Silberkleit, 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is—. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

ABNER J. SUNDELL

(Signature of Business Manager)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1939. Maurice Coyne (My commission expires March 30, 1940).
Notary Public, Bronx Co., No. 102, Reg. No. 56-C-40; Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 562, Reg. No. O-C-356; Cert. filed in Kings [SEAL] Co. No. 170, Reg. No. 360.

FANTASY TIMES

Number One

Conducted by JAMES V. TAURASI

March, 1940

INTRODUCTION

This page constitutes FUTURE FICTION'S journal for the science-fiction fan world, serving the same purpose as "The Fantasy Fan" department in our sister magazine, SCIENCE FICTION—a feature for the news and views of fan activities. We want you to be one of our reporters—so send us whatever "inside" dope you have about the authors, artists, fans, fan-mags, and their doings!

FANS AND FAN MAGAZINES

by Lane Stannard

Once in a blue moon, a new fan puts out a fan magazine that is an instant success. Such is the case with Harry Warner, Jr. of Hagerstown, Md., who edits "Spaceways." About a year ago, a few small notices appeared in "Imagination" that two fans were planning a new magazine to be entitled "Spaceways." Harry Warner was one of them. His co-partner was to do the publishing—via the hectograph, while Harry was to be editor. By what proved to be a blessing in disguise, the hectograph job was ruined, and Harry also took over the job of publication—producing a neat mimeographed mag. To the surprise of everyone, the first issue was way above average. Since then, Harry has published "Spaceways" regularly as a one-man job, and the contents have always been very high. The magazine is the best of its kind in the field. But Harry also writes articles and regular departments for other fan magazines, and is now attempting to break into the professional writing field. Harry Warner, Jr. is a *really* active fan, and I do mean active!

SCIENTIRADIO

by Millie Taurasi

Edgar Rice Burroughs spoke recently on the "We the People" program, over WABC, New York. He stated that Tarzan was born of night-

mares. His first story was about Mars, and he wrote it, said Burroughs, because it was the most impossible thing he could think of. He first used the pseudonym of Norman Bean, as a take-off on the words "normal being." "Norman" appeared instead of "Normal" due to a typographical error. Burroughs has written 25 Tarzan books and plans to publish one new one each year. His latest is "Tarzan the Magnificent." His Tarzan books alone have sold more than thirty million copies throughout the world. He does his publishing at Tarzana, California.

INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

—Conventions and Conferences

Science-fiction fans have been getting together and holding conventions for the past three years—and it all began by accident.

The First Eastern Convention was held in Philadelphia in 1936. A group of New York fans visited a bunch of enthusiasts in Philadelphia, and the gathering decided to designate the meeting as the First Eastern Science Fiction Convention. Thus started the series. There were only about a dozen fans at this first conflag.

The Second Eastern Convention took place during February, 1937, in Astoria, New York—in the hall where the Queens Science Fiction League now meets monthly. This was the largest gathering up to that time, with an attendance of about forty fans, editors, and authors. This conference was sponsored by the International Scientific Association, now disbanded. This special occasion published a special fan magazine, "The International Observer," containing articles by A. Merritt, J. Harvey Haggard, David H. Keller, etc.

Philadelphia was again chosen the convention city for the Third Eastern Convention of October, 1937. About thirty-five persons attended, and a convention booklet was pub-

lished by the sponsors, The Philadelphia Science Fiction Society.

In Newark, New Jersey, during May, 1938, William S. Sykora and Sam Moskowitz brought together a group of one hundred in the First National Science Fiction Convention—a gala affair attended by many well-knowns—John W. Campbell, Jr., Mort Weisinger, Otto and Jack Binder, and many others. More than twenty special fan magazines were published for this occasion.

The greatest fan-author-editor-artist gathering of all time, up to this writing, materialized with the World Science Fiction Convention of July, 1939, held in New York City, sponsored by New Fandom. More than 200 fans and celebrities enjoyed this three-day affair—visitors from every corner of the country—also Mexico and Canada. This elaborate convention has already been written up in most science-fiction magazines. *Time* magazine also gave the affair a two-column article. A special convention booklet was printed. One highlight of this Convention was the dinner in honor of science-fiction's first and foremost artist, Frank R. Paul.

These are only a few of the great get-togethers the fans have been enjoying during the past few years. Eastern fans hold annual meetings in Philadelphia—not to mention the many local meetings in such cities as New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.

The active enthusiasts are now busy preparing for the Second World Science Fiction Convention to be held in Chicago this coming September. The Illini Fantasy Fictioners will sponsor this affair, and it is hoped that many hundreds of science-fictioners will be present. Where will you be in 1940?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

—about any of the items on this page can be secured from James V. Taurasi, 137-07 32d Ave., Flushing, N. Y., for a three-cent stamp.

WHAT IS A FAN?

Is it something we cool ourselves with on a hot day?

Is it something that has made Sally Rand famous?

Perhaps!

But if we mention the words "science-fiction" and "fan" in the same breath, we get a very special picture. We see a person who believes in the future of Mankind—the super-civilizations that are today in the making—the conquering of the Universe by means of space-ships, eventually. . . .

But this person must do more than just *believe* in these things, in order to be a fan. He must be proud of his convictions and have the courage to boast of them before the world. He must be willing to point to science-fiction as the great source of prophecy!

You can be a science-fiction fan by introducing our literature to your friends—by pointing out to them its great inspirational value—its ability to transpose the reader into the Days to Come!

Ring Around the Sun

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Jimmy and Roy had murder in their hearts. Tricked into making a dangerous trip to Venus, all they could think of was how nice it will be to tear old Sourpuss into little pieces—as they froze in a space-ship close to the Sun!



"Look, the stars! We're out of it!"

JIMMY TURNER was humming merrily, if a bit raucously, when he entered the reception room.

"Is Old Sourpuss in?" he asked, accompanying the question with a wink at which the pretty secretary blushed gratefully.

"He is; and waiting for you." She motioned him towards the door on which was written in fat, black letters, "Frank McCutcheon, General Manager, United Space Mail."

Jim entered. "Hello, Skipper, what now?"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" McCutcheon looked up from his desk, champing a foul-smelling stogie. "Sit down."

McCutcheon stared at him from under bushy gray eyebrows. "Old Sourpuss," as he was euphoniously known to all members of United Space Mail, had never been known to laugh within the memory of the oldest inmate, though rumor did have it that when a child he had smiled at the sight of his father falling out of an apple-tree. Right now his expression made the rumor appear exaggerated.

"Now listen, Turner," he barked, "United Space Mail is inaugurating a new service and you're elected to blaze the trail." Disregarding Jimmy's grimace, he continued, "From now on the Venerian mail is on an all-year-round basis."

"What! I've always thought that it was ruinous from a financial standpoint to deliver the Venerian mail except when it was this side of the Sun."

"Sure," admitted McCutcheon, "if we follow the ordinary routes. But we might cut straight across the system if we could only get near enough to the sun. That's where you come in! They've put out a new ship equipped to approach within twenty million miles of the sun and which will be able to remain at that distance indefinitely."

Jimmy interrupted nervously, "Wait a while, S—Mr. McCutcheon, I don't quite follow. What kind of a ship is this?"

"How do you expect me to know? I'm no fugitive from a laboratory. From what they tell me, it emits some kind of a field that bends the radiations of the sun around the ship. Get it? It's all deflected. No heat reaches you. You can stay there forever and be cooler than in New York."

"Oh, is that so?" Jimmy was skeptical. "Has it been tested, or is that a little detail that has been left for me?"

"It's been tested, of course, but not under actual solar conditions."

"Then it's out. I've done plenty for

United, but this is the limit. I'm not crazy, yet."

McCutcheon stiffened. "Must I recall the oath you took upon entering the service, Turner. 'Our flight through space—'"

"'must ne'er be stopped by anything save death,'" finished Jimmy. "I know that as well as you do and I also notice that it's very easy to quote that from a comfortable armchair. If you're that idealistic, you can do it yourself. It's still out, as far as I'm concerned. And if you want, you can kick me out. I can get other jobs just like that," he snapped his fingers airily.

McCutcheon's voice dropped to a silky whisper. "Now, now, Turner, don't be hasty. You haven't heard all I have to say yet. Roy Snead is to be your mate."

"Huh! Snead! Why, that four-flusher wouldn't have the guts to take a job like this in a million years. Tell me some other fairy tale."

"Well, as a matter of fact, he has already accepted. I thought you might accompany him, but I guess he was right. He insisted you'd back down. I thought at first you wouldn't."

McCutcheon waved him away and bent his eyes unconcernedly on the report he had been scrutinizing at the time of Jimmy's entrance. Jimmy wheeled, hesitated, then returned.

"Wait a while, Mr. McCutcheon; do you mean to say that Roy is actually going?" McCutcheon nodded, still apparently absorbed in other matters, and Jimmy exploded, "Why, that low-down, spindle-shanked, dish-faced mug! So he thinks I'm too yellow to go! Well, I'll show him. I'll take the job and I'll put up ten dollars to a Venerian nickel that *he* gets sick at the last minute."

"Good!" McCutcheon rose and shook hands, "I thought you'd see reason. Major Wade has all the details. I think you leave in about six weeks and as I'm leaving for

Venus tomorrow, you'll probably meet me there."

Jimmy left, still boiling, and McCutcheon buzzed for the secretary. "Oh, Miss Wilson, get Roy Snead on the 'visor."

A few minutes' pause and then the red signal-light shone. The 'visor was clicked on and the dark-haired, dapper Snead appeared on the visi-plate.

"Hello, Snead," McCutcheon growled. "You lose that bet, Turner accepted that job. I thought he'd laugh himself sick when I told him you said he wouldn't go. Send over the twenty dollars, please."

"Wait a while, Mr. McCutcheon," Snead's face was dark with fury, "what's the idea of telling that punch-drunk imbecile I'm not going? You must have, you double-crosser. I'll be there all right, but you can put up another twenty and I'll bet he changes his mind, *yet*. But *I'll* be there." Roy Snead was still spluttering when McCutcheon clicked off.

The General Manager leaned back, threw away his mangled cigar, and lit a fresh one. His face remained sour, but there was a definite note of satisfaction in his tone when he said, "Ha! I thought that would get them."

IT WAS a tired and sweaty pair that blasted the good ship *Helios* across Mercury's orbit. In spite of the perfunctory friendship enforced upon them by the weeks alone in space, Jimmy Turner and Roy Snead were scarcely on speaking terms. Add to this hidden hostility, the heat of the bloated sun and the torturing uncertainty of the final outcome of the trip and you have a miserable pair indeed.

Jimmy peered tiredly at the maze of dials confronting him, and, brushing a damp lock of hair from his eyes, grunted, "What's the thermometer reading now, Roy?"

"One hundred twenty-five degrees Fahrenheit and still climbing," was the growled response.

Jimmy cursed fluently, "The cooling system is on at maximum, the ship's hull reflects 95% of the solar radiation, and it's still in the hundred twenties." He paused. "The gravometer indicates that we're still some thirty-five million miles from the Sun. Fifteen million miles to go before the Deflection Field becomes effective. The temperature will probably scale 150 yet. That's a sweet prospect! Check the dessicators. If the air isn't kept absolutely dry, we're not going to last long."

Within Mercury's orbit, think of it!" Snead's voice was husky. "No one has ever been this close to the sun before. And we're going closer yet."

"There have been many this close and closer," reminded Jimmy, "but *they* were out of control and landed *in* the sun. Friedländer, Debuc, Anton—" His voice trailed into a brooding silence.

Roy stirred uneasily. "How effective is this Deflection Field anyway, Jimmy? Your cheerful thoughts aren't very soothing, you know."

"Well, it's been tested under the harshest conditions laboratory technicians could devise. I've watched them. It's been bathed in radiation approximating the sun's at a distance of twenty million. The Field worked like a charm. The light was bent about it so that the ship became invisible. The men inside the ship claimed that everything outside became invisible and that no heat reached them. A funny thing, though, the Field will work only under certain radiation strengths."

"Well, I wish it were over one way or the other," Roy glowered. "If Old Sourpuss is thinking of making this my regular run—, well, he'll lose his ace pilot."

"He'll lose his *two* ace pilots," Jimmy corrected.

The two lapsed into silence and the *Helios* blasted on.

The temperature climbed: 130, 135, 140. Then, three days later, with the mercury

quivering at 148, Roy announced that they were approaching the critical belt, the belt where the solar radiation reached sufficient intensity to energize the Field.

The two waited, minds at feverish concentration, pulses pounding.

"Will it happen suddenly?"

"I don't know. We'll have to wait."

From the portholes, only the stars were visible. The sun, three times the size as seen from Earth, poured its blinding rays upon opaque metal, for on this specially designed ship, portholes closed automatically when struck by powerful radiation.

And then the stars began disappearing. Slowly, at first, the dimmest faded—then the brighter ones: Polaris, Regulus, Arcturus, Sirius. Space was uniformly black.

"It's working," breathed Jimmy. The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the sunward portholes clicked open. The sun was gone!

"Ha! I feel cooler already," Jimmy Turner was jubilant. "Boy, it worked like a charm. You know, if they could adjust this Deflection Field to all radiation strengths, we would have perfected invisibility. It would make a convenient war weapon." He lit a cigarette and leaned back luxuriously.

"But meanwhile we're flying blind," Roy insisted.

Jimmy grinned patronizingly, "You needn't worry about that, Dishface. I've taken care of everything. We're in an orbit about the sun. In two weeks, we'll be on the opposite side and then I'll let the rockets blast and out of this band we go, zooming towards Venus." He was very self-satisfied indeed.

"Just leave it to Jimmy 'Brains' Turner. I'll have us through in two months, instead of the regulation six. You're with United's ace pilot, now."

Roy laughed nastily. "To listen to you, you'd think you did all the work. All you're doing is to run the ship on the course *I've*

plotted. *You're* the mechanic; *I'm* the brains."

"Oh, is that so? Any damn pilot-school rookie can plot a course. It takes a man to navigate one."

"Well, that's your opinion. Who's paid more though, the navigator or the course-plotter?"

JIMMY gulped on that one and Roy stalked triumphantly out of the pilot room. Unmindful of all this, the *Helios* blasted on.

For two days, all was serene; then, on the third day, Jimmy inspected the thermometer, scratched his head and looked worried. Roy entered, watched the proceedings and raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Is anything wrong?" He bent over and read the height of the thin, red column. "Just 100 degrees. That's nothing to look like a sick goat over. From your expression, I thought something had gone wrong with the Deflection Field and that it was rising again," he turned away with an ostentatious yawn.

"Oh, shut up, you senseless ape," Jimmy's foot lifted in a half-hearted attempt at a kick. "I'd feel a lot better if the temperature were rising. This Deflection Field is working a lot too good for my liking."

"Huh! What do you mean?"

"I'll explain and if you listen carefully, you *may* understand me. This ship is built like a vacuum bottle. It gains heat only with the greatest of difficulty and loses it likewise." He paused and let his words sink in. "At ordinary temperatures this ship is not supposed to lose more than two degrees a day if no outside sources of heat are supplied. *Perhaps* at the temperature at which we were, the loss might amount to five degrees a day. Do you get me?"

Roy's mouth was open wide and Jimmy

continued. "Now this blasted ship has lost fifty degrees in less than three days."

"But that's impossible."

"There it is," Jimmy pointed ironically. "I'll tell you what's wrong. It's that damn Field. It acts as a repulsive agent towards electromagnetic radiations and somehow is hastening the loss of heat of our ship."

Roy sank into thought and did some rapid mental calculations. "If what you say is true," he said at length, "we'll hit freezing point in five days and then spend a week in what amounts to winter weather."

"That's right. Even allowing for the decrease in heat-loss as the temperature is lowered, we'll probably end up with the mercury anywhere between thirty and forty *below*."

Roy gulped unhappily. "And at twenty million miles away from the sun!"

"That isn't the worst," Jimmy pointed out. "This ship, like all others used for travel within the orbit of Mars, has no heating system. With the sun shining like fury and no way to lose heat except by ineffectual radiation, Mars and Venus space-ships have always specialized in cooling systems. We, for instance, have a very efficient refrigeration device."

"We're in a devil of a fix, then. The same applies to our space suits."

In spite of the still roasting temperature, the two were beginning to experience a few anticipatory chills.

"Say, I'm not going to stand this," Roy burst out. "I vote we get out of here right now and head for Earth. They can't expect more of us."

"Go ahead! You're the pilot. Can you plot a course at this distance from the sun and guarantee that we won't fall *into* the sun?"

"Hell! I hadn't thought of that."

The two were at their wits' end. Communication via radio had been impossible ever since they had passed Mercury's orbit. The sun was at sunspot maximum

and static had drowned out all attempts.

So they settled down to wait.

The next few days were taken up entirely with thermometer watching, with a few minutes taken out here and there when one of the two happened to think of an unused malediction to hurl at the head of Mr. Frank McCutcheon. Eating and sleeping were indulged in, but not enjoyed.

And meanwhile, the *Helios*, entirely unconcerned in the plight of its occupants, blasted on.

As Roy had predicted, the temperature passed the red line marked "Freezing" towards the end of their seventh day in the Deflection Belt. The two were remarkably unhappy when this happened even though they had expected it.

Jimmy had drawn off about a hundred gallons of water from the tank. With this he had filled almost every vessel on board.

"It might," he pointed out, "save the pipes from bursting when the water freezes. And if they do, as is probable, it is just as well that we supply ourselves with plenty of available water. We have to stay here another week, you know."

And on the next day, the eighth, the water froze. There were the buckets, overflowing with ice, standing chill and blue-cold. The two gazed at them forlornly. Jimmy broke one open.

"Frozen solid," he said bleakly and wrapped another sheet about himself.

It was hard to think of anything but the increasing cold now. Roy and Jimmy had requisitioned every sheet and blanket on the ship, after having put on three or four shirts and a like number of pairs of pants.

They kept in bed for as long as they were able, and when forced to move out, they huddled near the small oil-burner for warmth. Even this doubtful pleasure was soon denied them for, as Jimmy remarked, "the oil supply is extremely limited and we will need the burner to thaw out the water and food."

Tempers were short and clashes frequent, but the common misery kept them from actually jumping on each other's throats. It was on the tenth day, however, that the two, united by a common hatred, suddenly became friends.

THE temperature was hovering down near the zero point, making up its mind to descend into the minus regions. Jimmy was huddled in a corner thinking of the times back in New York when he had complained of the August heat and wondered how he could have done so. Roy, meanwhile, had manipulated numb fingers long enough to calculate that they would have to endure the coldness for exactly 6354 minutes more.

He regarded the figures with distaste and read them off to Jimmy. The latter scowled and grunted, "The way I feel, I'm not going to last 54 minutes, let alone 6354." Then, impatiently, "I wish you could manage to think of some way of getting us out of this."

"If we weren't so near the sun," suggested Roy, "we might start the rear blasts and hurry us up."

"Yes, and if we landed *in* the sun, we'd be nice and warm. You're a big help!"

"Well, you're the one that calls himself 'Brains' Turner. *You* think of something. The way you talk, you'd think all this was my fault."

"It certainly is, you donkey in human clothing! My better judgment told me all along not to go on this fool trip. When McCutcheon proposed it, I refused point-blank. I knew better." Jimmy was very bitter. "So what happened? Like the fool you are, you accept and rush in where sensible men fear to tread. And then, of course, I naturally *had* to tag along.

"Why, do you know what I should have done," Jimmy's voice ascended the scale, "I shouldn't have let you go alone and freeze and then sit down by a roaring fire all by

myself and gloated. That is, if I had known what was going to happen."

A hurt and surprised look appeared on Roy's face. "Is that so? So that's how it is! Well, all I can say is that you certainly have a genius for twisting facts, if for nothing else. The fact of the matter is that *you* were unutterably stupid enough to accept and *I* the poor fellow raked in by the force of circumstances."

Jimmy's expression was one of the utmost disdain. "Evidently the cold has driven you batty, though I admit it wouldn't take much to knock the little sense you possess out of you."

"Listen," Roy answered hotly. "On October 10th, McCutcheon called me up on the 'visor and told me you had accepted and laughed at me for a yellow-belly for refusing to go. Do you deny that?"

"Yes, I do, and unconditionally. On October 10, Sourpuss told *me* that *you* had decided to go and had bet him that—"

Jimmy's voice faded away very suddenly and a shocked look spread over his face. "Say—, are you sure McCutcheon told you I had agreed to go?"

A chill, clammy feeling clutched at Roy's heart when he caught Jimmy's drift, a feeling that drowned out the numbness of the cold.

"Absolutely," he answered, "I'll swear to that. That's why I went."

"But he told me you had accepted and that's why *I* went." Jimmy felt very stupid all at once.

The two fell into a protracted and ominous silence which was broken at length by Roy, who spoke in a voice that quivered with emotion.

"Jimmy, we've been the victims of a contemptible, dirty, lowdown, double-crossing trick." His eyes dilated with fury. "We've been cheated, robbed—," words failed him but he kept on uttering meaningless sounds, indicative mainly of devouring rage.

Jimmy was cooler, but none the less vindictive, "You're right, Roy; McCutcheon has done us dirty. He has plumbed the depths of human iniquity. But we'll get even. When we get through in 6300 odd minutes, we will have a score to settle with Mr. McCutcheon."

"What are we going to do?" Roy's eyes were filled with a blood-thirsty joy.

"On the spur of the moment, I suggest that we simply tear into him and rend him into tiny, little pieces."

"Not gruesome enough. How about boiling him in oil?"

"That's reasonable, yes; but it might take too long. Let's give him a good old-fashioned beating—with brass knuckles."

Roy rubbed his hands. "We'll have lots of time to think up some really adequate measures. The dirty, God-forsaken, yellow-livered leprous—" The rest verged fluently into the unprintable.

And for four more days, the temperature dove. It was on the fourteenth and last day that the mercury froze, the solid red shaft pointed its congealed finger at forty below.

On this terrible last day, they had lit the oil-burner, using their entire scanty supply of oil. Shivering and more than half frozen, they crouched close, attempting to extract every last drop of heat.

Jimmy had found a pair of ear-muffs several days before in some obscure corner, and it now changed hands at the end of every hour. Both sat buried under a small mountain of blankets, chafing chilled hands and feet. With every passing minute, their conversation, concerning McCutcheon almost exclusively, grew more vitriolic.

"Always quoting that triply-damned slogan of the Space Mail: 'Our flight through sp—'" Jimmy choked with impotent fury.

"Yes, and always rubbing holes in chairs instead of coming out here and doing something like a man's work, the rotten so-and-so," agreed Roy.

"Well, we're due to pass out of the deflection zone in two hours. Then three weeks and we'll be on Venus," said Jimmy, sneezing.

"That can't be too soon for me," answered Sneed, who had been sniffing for the last two days. "I'm never taking another space trip except maybe the one that takes me back to Earth. After this, I make my living growing bananas in Central America. A fellow can be decently warm out there at least."

"We might not get off Venus, after what we're going to do to McCutcheon."

"No, you're right there. But that's all right. Venus is even warmer than Central America and that's all I care about."

"We have no legal worries either," Jimmy sneezed again. "On Venus, life imprisonment's the limit for first-degree murder. A nice, warm, dry cell for the rest of my life. What could be sweeter?"

The second hand on the chronometer whirled at its even pace; the minutes ticked off. Roy's hands hovered lovingly over the lever that would set off the right rear blasts which would drive the *Helios* out away from the sun and from that terrible Deflection Zone.

And at last, "Go!" shouted Jimmy eagerly. "Let her blast!"

With a deep reverberating roar, the rockets fired. The *Helios* trembled from stem to stern. The pilots felt the acceleration press them back into their seats and were happy. In a matter of minutes, the sun would shine again and they would be warm, feel the blessed heat once more.

It happened before they were aware of it. There was a momentary flash of light and then a grinding and a click, as the sunward portholes closed.

"Look," cried Roy, "the stars! We're out of it!" He cast an ecstatically happy glance at the thermometer. "Well, old boy, from now on we go up again." He pulled the blankets about him closer, for the cold still lingered.

THERE were two men in Frank McCutcheon's office at the Venus branch of the United Space Mail: McCutcheon himself and the elderly, white-haired Zebulon Smith, inventor of the Deflection Field. Smith was talking.

"But, Mr. McCutcheon, it is really of great importance that I learn exactly how my Deflection Field worked. Surely they have transmitted all possible information to you."

McCutcheon's face was a study in dourness as he bit the edge off one of his two-for-five cigars and lit it.

"That, my dear Mr. Smith," he said, "is exactly what they did not do. Ever since they have receded far enough from the sun to render communication possible, I have been sending requests for information regarding the practicability of the Field. They just refuse to answer. They say it worked and that they're alive and that they'll give the details when they reach Venus. That's all!"

Zebulon Smith sighed in disappointment. "Isn't that a bit unusual; insubordination, so to speak? I thought they were required to be complete in their reports and to give any requested details."

"So they are. But these are my ace pilots and rather temperamental. We have to extend some leeway. Besides, I tricked them into going on this trip, a very hazardous one, as you know, and so am inclined to be lenient."

"Well, then, I suppose I must wait."

"Oh, it won't be for long," McCutcheon assured him. "They're due today, and I assure you that as soon as I get in touch with them, I shall send you the full details. After all, they survived for two weeks at a distance of twenty million miles from the sun, so your invention is a success. That should satisfy you."

Smith had scarcely left, when McCutcheon's secretary entered with a puzzled frown on her face.

"Something is wrong with the two pilots of the *Helios*, Mr. McCutcheon," she informed him. "I have just received a bulletin from Major Wade at Pallas City where they landed. They have refused to attend the celebration prepared for them, but instead immediately chartered a rocket to come here, refusing to state the reason. When Major Wade tried to stop them, they became violent, he says." She laid the communication down on his desk.

McCutcheon glanced at it perfunctorily. "Hmm! They do seem confoundedly temperamental. Well, send them to me when they come. I'll snap them out of it."

It was perhaps three hours later that the problem of the two misbehaving pilots again forced itself upon his mind, this time by a sudden commotion that had arisen in the reception room. He heard the deep angry tones of two men and then the shrill remonstrances of his secretary. Suddenly the door burst open and Jim Turner and Roy Snead strode in.

Roy coolly closed the door and planted his back against it.

"Don't let anyone disturb me until I'm through," Jimmy told him.

"No one's getting through this door for a while," Roy answered grimly, "but remember, you promised to leave some for me."

McCutcheon said nothing during all this, but when he saw Turner casually draw a pair of brass knuckles from his pocket and put them on with a determined air, he decided that it was time to call a halt to the comedy.

"Hello, boys," he said, with a heartiness unusual in him. "Glad to see you again. Take a seat."

Jimmy ignored the offer. "Have you anything to say, any last request, before I start operations?" He gritted his teeth with an unpleasant scraping noise.

"Well, if you put it that way," said McCutcheon, "I might ask exactly what this is all about—if I'm not being too un-

reasonable. Perhaps the Deflector was inefficient and you had a hot trip."

The only answer to that was a loud snort from Roy and a cold stare on the part of Jimmy.

"First," said the latter, "what was the idea of that filthy, disgusting cheat you pulled on us."

McCutcheon's eyebrows raised in surprise. "Do you mean the little white lies I told you in order to get you to go? Why, that was nothing. Common business practice, that's all. Why, I pull worse things than that every day and people consider it just routine. Besides, what harm did it do you?"

"Tell him about our 'pleasant trip,' Jimmy," urged Roy.

"That's exactly what I'm going to do," was the response. He turned to McCutcheon and assumed a martyr-like air. "First, on this blasted trip, we fried in a temperature that reached 150 but that was to be expected and we're not complaining; we were half Mercury's distance from the sun.

"But after that, we entered this zone where the light bends around us; incoming radiation sank to zero and we started losing heat and not just a degree a day the way we learned it in pilot school." He paused to breathe a few novel curses he had just thought of, then continued.

"In three days, we were down to a hundred and in a week down to freezing. Then for one entire week, seven long days, we drove through our course at sub-freezing temperature. It was so cold the last day that the mercury froze." Turner's voice rose till it cracked, and at the door, a fit of self-pity caused Roy to catch his breath with an audible gulp. McCutcheon remained inscrutable.

JIMMY continued. "There we were without a heating system, in fact, no heat of any kind, not even any warm clothing. We froze, damn it; we had to thaw out our

food and melt our water. We were stiff, couldn't move. It was hell, I tell you, in reverse temperature." He paused, at a loss for words.

Roy Snead took up the burden. "We were twenty million miles away from the sun and I had a case of frost-bitten ears. Frost-bitten, I say." He shook his fist viciously under McCutcheon's nose. "And it was your fault. You tricked us into it! While we were freezing, we promised ourselves that we'd come back and get you and we're going to keep that promise." He turned to Jimmy. "Go ahead, start it, will you? We've wasted enough time."

"Hold it, boys," McCutcheon spoke at last. "Let me get this straight. You mean to say that the Deflection Field worked so well that it kept all the radiation away and sucked out what heat there was in the ship in the first place?" Jimmy grunted a curt assent.

"And you froze for a week because of that?" McCutcheon continued.

Again the grunt.

And then a very strange and unusual thing happened. McCutcheon, "Old Sourpuss," the man without the "risis" muscle, smiled. He actually bared his teeth in a grin. And what's more, the grin grew wider and wider until finally a rusty, long-unused chuckle was heard louder and louder, until it developed into a full-fledged laugh, and the laugh into a bellow. In one stentorian burst, McCutcheon made up for a lifetime of sour gloom.

The walls reverberated, the window-panes rattled, and still the Homeric laughter continued. Roy and Jimmy stood open-mouthed, entirely non-plussed. A puzzled bookkeeper thrust his head inside the door in a fit of temerity and remained frozen in his tracks. Others crowded about the door, conversing in awed whispers. *McCutcheon had laughed!*

Gradually, the risibilities of the old General Manager subsided. He ended in

a fit of choking and finally turned a purple face towards his ace pilots, whose surprise had long since given way to indignation.

"Boys," he told them, "that was the best joke I ever heard. You can consider your pay doubled, both of you." He was still grinning away like clockwork and had developed a beautiful case of hiccoughs.

The two pilots were left cold at the handsome proposal. "What's so killingly funny?" Jimmy wanted to know, "I don't see anything to laugh at myself."

McCutcheon's voice dripped honey, "Now, fellows, before I left I gave each of you several mimeographed sheets containing special instructions. What happened to them?"

There was sudden embarrassment in the air.

"I don't know. I must have mislaid mine," gulped Roy.

"I never looked at mine; I forgot about it," Jimmy was genuinely dismayed.

"You see," exclaimed McCutcheon triumphantly, "It was all the fault of your own stupidity."

"How do you figure that out?" Jimmy wanted to know. "Major Wade told us all we had to know about the ship, and besides, I guess there's nothing *you* could tell us about running one."

"Oh, isn't there? Wade evidently forgot to inform you of one minor point which you would have found on my instructions. The strength of the Deflection Field was *adjustable*. It happened to be set at maximum strength when you started, that's all." He was beginning to chuckle faintly once more. "Now if you had taken the trouble to read the sheets, you would have known that a simple movement of a small lever," he made the appropriate gesture with his thumb, "would have weakened the Field any desired amount and allowed as much radiation to leak through as was wanted."

And now the chuckle was becoming louder. "And you froze for a week because you didn't have the brains to pull a lever. And then you ace pilots come here and blame *me*. What a laugh!" and off he went again while a pair of very sheepish young men glanced askance at each other.

When McCutcheon came around to normal, Jimmy and Roy were gone.

Down in an alley adjoining the building, a little ten-year-old boy watched, with open mouth and intense absorption, two young men who were engaged in the strange and rather startling occupation of kicking each other alternately. They were vicious kicks, too!

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Send Letters to Editor, Future Fiction, 60 Hudson St., N. Y.

ESPERANTO —PEACE TO THE WORLD!

by CHARLES D. HORNIG

ONCE upon a time, there was a traveling salesman. His name was "Sunny" Smead, a big jovial fellow with a ready smile. He was an "ace" at the selling game. His boss admitted it. His customers avowed it. His friends asserted it. And if further proof is needed, I might mention that he had accounts throughout the United States. He was a good practical psychologist, as every ace salesman must be, and he understood people.

Upon approaching a prospect, Smead (he sold tires) would strike up a chord of friendship that was not in the least concerned with tires. After a friendly chat, the salesman would very cleverly bring up the subject of tires, and—more often than not—land a good order.

Nine chances out of ten, the tire salesman would not have had a customer if he had not first created a bond of friendship with the prospect—but a good salesman makes friends quickly and friends like to help each other—hence, business!

The point I wish to bring out is that this friendship was created by an easy conversation. Let us suppose that each state in the Union had its own language. What a dilemma for "Sunny" Smead! He would have had to learn dozens of languages to continue his route—and still his business would fall off tremendously, because he could not possibly hold easy conversations (the things that clinch sales) in more than a very few tongues, even if he were a linguist.

(Continued on page 100)

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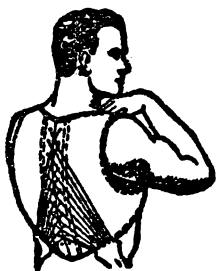
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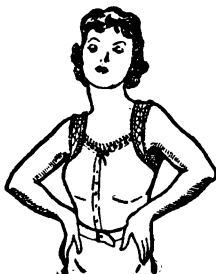


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(Continued from page 99)

Fortunately, a salesman in the United States does not have this trouble, and Smead met the above circumstances only in nightmares.

We all know that, in order for people to become really friendly—except in unusual cases—it is necessary that they understand each other. In other words, real friends must speak the same language.

OVER half a century ago, a man by the name of L. L. Zamenhof lived in Warsaw. In his own neighborhood—within a few blocks—five languages were spoken by the natives, and few of them could understand even one of the other four tongues! Here Zamenhof saw a crying need for comprehension. He was a competent linguist, and he dreamt of a tongue that would be easy for all to learn, and could be used for easy communication between people who were linguistic foreigners.

But Zamenhof was not just a dreamer—he was a doer. As a result, after long years of effort, he developed a language that was truly international—easily learned and used by anyone—Esperanto!

In Esperanto, Zamenhof gave to the world a means of communication that was different from all others—because it meant the first real friendship among people of different tongues! Now there are millions of souls throughout the world who know and love each other because they have come to understand each other through a common language.

A person who has learned Esperanto has many good friends among the French, Germans, Italians, Russians, Dutch, Scandinavian, Belgian, and everywhere in the world—so he has become prejudiced in favor of *people!*

Prejudice *against* people as a group feeds upon differences of language—and war is often the outcome. You couldn't teach a

(Continued on page 102)

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Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is to thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—
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but a valuable, proved device which
has been sold successfully by busi-
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Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

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Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business, you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

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(Continued from page 100)

New Yorker to hate all Pennsylvanians—because they are all of a common human understanding. Whereas, political propaganda can easily teach one group of people to hate another, when their languages are different. They have nothing to go by but the publicity that is fed to them through the censored press! They have been prevented from ever becoming friendly with individuals in the enemy land, and war is easy when there are no great friendships to be broken.

Zamenhof saw in Esperanto, his international tongue, more than a convenient aid to world commerce, where it is greatly used. He saw the ultimate unifying of all the peoples in the world—not a unity of politics, or customs, or religions—but a much deeper union; a spiritual, moral union that means tolerance and understanding.

ESPERANTO aims to end war, not through refusal to defend, nor revolution, nor political seizure, nor dictatorship—but by making all war seem futile, as it really is. Esperanto, by providing a common method of communication, wants people to realize that another man, in another country, under another set of customs and government, is just as human, just as much of a man, and has just as much right to live his life in his own way, as the neighbor next door.

Every year, George A. Connor of New York City leads a "karavano" of American Esperantists through a group of European countries. There they meet Esperantists of many different native tongues—but they all speak Esperanto. They all converse freely in Esperanto regardless of the mother languages, and they are all good *friends*.

Esperantists are citizens of all nations, but they are all *people*. The larger these Esperanto groups grow, the more friendship is created among those who formerly had

(Continued on page 104)



'THAR'S GOLD IN THEM THAR HILL-BILLY SONGS"

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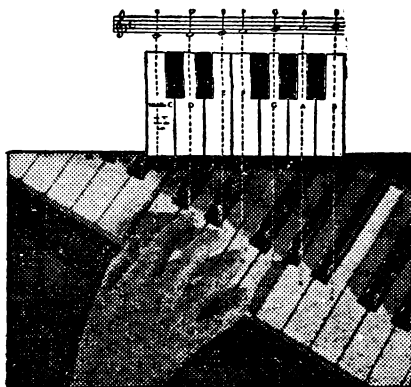
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HOW TO GET STRONG


DEVELOP A POWERFUL GRIP


(Continued from page 102)

no real bonds between them. If the Esperantists reach their goal, these groups will be so great that they will encompass all the peoples of all the nations, and it follows that war between any two nations will be ridiculous, because there will be no basis for race hatred. "Peace through understanding," say the Esperantists.

The Esperanto Association of North America, 1410 H St. N. W., Washington, D. C., sponsors a National Convention of Esperantists in some American city each year.

LETTERS FROM READERS

A department compiled from the most interesting letters sent in by the fans. Send in your comments to EDITOR, FUTURE FICTION, 60 Hudson St., New York City.

Dear Reader:

This is the first edition of our readers' department—and I'd like your help in finding a good name for it. As a special prize, I will give the original cover painting on this issue of FUTURE FICTION absolutely free to the reader who sends me the most interesting letter this month, commenting upon FUTURE FICTION or any phase of science-fiction—and suggesting a good title for this department.

So, if you'd like to possess an original Scott painting, get busy on that letter!

By the way—did you know that FUTURE FICTION has an older sister? Your nearest newsdealer is waiting to sell you a copy of SCIENCE FICTION—same price, same fine quality of fantasy stories—and, in addition, many interesting departments and features—the kind the fans go for in a big way! Get your copy of the current SCIENCE FICTION today,

(Continued on page 106)

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Other symptoms of weak kidneys and irritated bladder may be backache, puffy eyes, shifting pains, burning or scanty passage.

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**Over 120,000 People Have Already Provided a Cash
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Sick benefits up to \$100 a month when you are laid up from ANY kind of sickness will be paid under a New health policy now issued by the National Protective Insurance Co.

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(Continued from page 104)

or you may be disappointed—the supply is limited.

Remember that I want you to be my Assistant Editor—I need your help in forming the permanent policies of **FUTURE FICTION**, so be sure to let me know just what you want to appear in the magazine—your favorite authors, types of stories, features, departments, artists, etc. I'll be waiting for your letter!

CHARLES D. HORNIG,
EDITOR, FUTURE FICTION
60 Hudson Street, New York City.

NO NUDE IS GOOD NUDE

Dear Mr. Hornig:

I received the first issue of **FUTURE FICTION** five hours ago. I finished it five minutes ago. Consequently, here is the fan letter I promised you and if it isn't the first one to get to you, it's not my fault.

First off, I am pleased and, to tell the truth, somewhat surprised at Haggard's feature novel, "World Reborn." Haggard tends toward melodrama and "horror" scenes, both of which are to be found in the yarn, and yet "World Reborn" turned out to be good stuff. The writing was fine, especially the first half. All in all, it is the author's best piece of work since "Evolution Satellite," which was published in the *old Wonder* some six years ago.

Second honors go to Dennis Clive's "Frigid Moon." I know very well that it is what fans call a "Weinbaum-imitation" in that it contains the late S. G. W.'s favorite type of character—a screwy animal in an alien environment. However, I have never really been able to work up any resentment over a Weinbaum imitation. My viewpoint is this. Weinbaum invented a new type of story—the most entertaining of any I've ever read, excluding the heavy super-super-science of Smith and Campbell, but he has no copyright ownership of that type of yarn. He is dead now, poor fellow (and poor stf., too), and that is no reason why this very successful type of story should be allowed to die out. If there are authors who can think up screwy animals after the fashion of Weinbaum, why shouldn't they? Perhaps they can do it as well as Weinbaum could, and wouldn't that be a gain for science-fiction? True, no one has yet turned up that even made a patch

(Continued on page 108)

The Money Making Marvel of the Age!

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Hand Tinted in Natural Life Like Colors, 10c Extra It's here! The hottest, most sensational, most gripping selling idea of the age! THE PICTURE RING — the ring men and women everywhere rich and poor, young and old want to wear and keep their whole lives long. Why? Because on this beautiful ring is permanently reproduced any photograph, snapshot or picture of some loved one. Yes — reproduced clearly and sharply and made part of the ring itself so it can't rub off, come off or fade off. This sensational new idea is making an unbelievable hit. Men and women—even those without an hour's selling experience—are taking dozens of orders a day and making dollars of profit by the handful. And now, in your territory, YOU can cash in big, every day, with this exciting sure-fire profit-maker and earn money so easily, it will seem more like play than work.

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For only \$1.00 retail—look what you offer! A made-to-measure onyx-like ring adorned with the most precious setting in the world — a reproduction of the picture of a loved one. The ring itself can't tarnish. It will wear forever with ordinary care. The picture of the loved one is clearly, sharply reproduced with surprising faithfulness and becomes an inseparable part of the ring. It can't wear off, rub off, or fade off.

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MOTHER HUSBAND BABY



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City _____

YOUR RING SIZE: Write strip of paper around second joint of finger. Cross an elastic measuring string across from top on this sheet. Number at end is your size.

Please mention DOUBLE ACTION GROUP when answering advertisements

(Continued from page 106)

on the immortal Stanley G., but is that any reason to quit trying—and hoping? So—give us more Weinbaum imitations, provided they are good enough to print, and maybe some day if I'm drunk or filled with opium or for some other reason filled with wild over-confidence, I'll write one myself—you can always reject it.

I suppose I ought to balance the letter by a few knocks as well as a bunch of boosts. Who am I to curry favor with an editor? So—I don't like the cover. First, it is not sufficiently science-fictionish. Secondly, it has a nude woman on the cover (with the alien's arm and the metal band about her chest in awfully convenient places), which is bad taste for a respectable stf. magazine. Thirdly, it is not by Paul. Fourthly, it doesn't illustrate any story, which is a fault held in common with SCIENCE FICTION.

Well, anyway, I'm glad that love interest is held down to a moderate level and to easily-digested portions. For a minute, when I first saw the magazine, the cover scared me. I guess I should have had more faith in you, Mr. Hornig, for my stf. experiences since you first took over Wonder in 1933 should have reminded me that you never were one to impose super-sex upon us poor suffering readers.

How I wish I could say that for every stf. magazine on the market today! Oh, well, maybe some day I will be able to do so.

ISAAC ASIMOV.
174 Windsor Pl., Brooklyn, N. Y.

(The lady-in-distress on the cover seems to be popular with pulp readers, but if we get too many complaints from the science-fiction fans, the type of covers will be changed. For Paul covers, we suggest our sister mag, SCIENCE FICTION.—EDITOR.

TO CHICAGO IN 1940!

Dear Mr. Hornig:

To sponsor the Chicago World Science Fiction Convention in 1940, an organization called the Illini Fantasy Fictioners has been formed. Its membership ranks are open to fans all over the world—so come on you fans who have not as yet joined! Get on the band wagon and help us make the Chicago Convention a success! The

(Continued on page 110)

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29x4.50-20	2.25	1.05	.25	32x3 1/4	2.95	1.25	32x3 1/2	3.65
29x4.50-21	2.25	1.05	.25	32x3 1/4	2.95	1.25	32x3 1/2	3.65
29x4.75-19	2.45	1.30	.25	32x3 1/4	2.95	1.25	32x3 1/2	3.75
29x4.75-20	2.45	1.30	.25	32x3 1/4	2.95	1.25	32x3 1/2	3.75
29x5.00-19	2.65	1.35	.25	32x3 1/4	3.35	1.45	32x3 1/2	3.95
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30x2.25-20	2.95	1.35	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.65
31x2.25-21	3.15	1.45	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.95
31x2.50-17	3.25	1.45	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.95
31x2.50-18	3.25	1.45	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.95
31x2.50-19	3.25	1.45	.25	TRUCK BALLOON TIRES				
31x2.50-20	3.25	1.45	.25	30x2 1/2	\$3.75	\$1.65	32x3 1/2	\$3.75
31x2.50-21	3.25	1.45	.25	30x2 1/2	\$3.75	\$1.65	32x3 1/2	\$3.75
32x2.00-20	3.45	1.55	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.65
32x2.00-21	3.45	1.55	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.65
32x2.50-20	3.75	1.75	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.65
32x2.50-21	3.75	1.75	.25	30x2 1/2	3.95	1.75	32x3 1/2	4.65
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Wouldn't it be a grand and glorious feeling to forget rupture worry completely and let peace of mind and new zest for living make you look younger? But you can't if a gouging, uncomfortable truss nags you constantly, if you never know a moment's security, if you feel your rupture is growing worse all the time, with not even hope of the opening closing up. Worry, worry, worry, day after day, for all your life . . . why, it's bound to make any man or woman look old, haggard, and worn out beyond their years. Don't, don't, don't submit to this terrible, needless tragedy of dragging, ageing worry. At this very moment, as you read these words you can

decide to enter upon a glorious new life. Not by some clap-trap, senseless "magic"; but by the thoroughly effective aid of the world-famous BROOKS Patented AIR-CUSHION Rupture Support—that

holds with a velvet touch; yet so securely that you practically forget rupture, banish worry, become normally active and again know the zest and joy of life that cannot help but make you look younger. Scores of thousands know this is true. Let the Brooks help you.

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BROOKS asks no man or woman to buy a Brooks Appliance outright, on faith alone. Instead it will be sent you on a thorough trial. Wear it. Put it to every test for heavenly comfort and security. If you or your doctor are not satisfied, return the BROOKS and the trial will cost you nothing. So if you have reducible rupture send for a BROOKS Air-Cushion truss and let it prove itself on your own body. How doctors regard the BROOKS is shown by the fact that more than 9,000 have ordered, either for themselves or their patients.

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Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy a BROOKS. But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine BROOKS is never sold in stores or by agents. It is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. The Patented Air-Cushion Support does away completely with hard, gouging, painful pads. There are no stiff, punishing springs. Instead, the yielding, clinging, secure AIR-CUSHION and velvet soft body band. Sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. No metal girdle to rust or corrode. And the Patented Automatic AIR-CUSHION continually works to give Nature a chance to close the opening. What a contrast to ordinary hard-pad uncomfortable trusses!

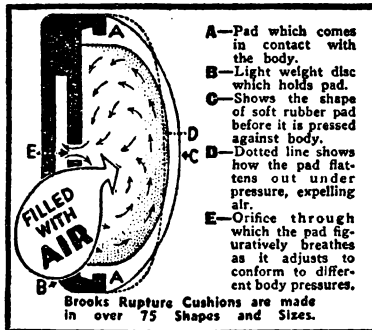
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MARSHALL, MICH.



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In PLAIN ENVELOPE, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER. No one is to call on me personally about my rupture.

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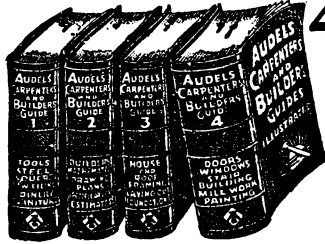
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 Well illustrated, educational and also tells of our **MILD and Effective TREATMENT**

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 SALINA, Box 332 KANSAS

(Continued from page 108)

membership fee is low, so why not write today for details?

RICHARD I. MEYER.

3156 Cambridge Ave., Chicago, Ill.

(I know that your organization is made up of the most active fans in the country, and I hope that many of our readers will get in touch with you, so that the Chicago Convention will be even greater than the one in New York last year.—EDITOR.)

A LONG, PROSPEROUS LIFE!

Dear Mr. Hornig:

Just a line to let you know that I just got my copy of *FUTURE FICTION*. Although J. W. Scott does good covers for your companion detective and western magazines, I do not believe he belongs on a science-fiction magazine cover. Use Paul.

The best story in the first issue is J. Harvey Haggard's "World Reborn." "Frigid Moon" rates second. Your side-binding is very attractive. Keep it that way. How about a reader's column? In closing, let me wish both *SCIENCE FICTION* and *FUTURE FICTION* a long and prosperous life.

DAVE GLAZER.

21 Ellington St., Dorchester, Mass.

(If you can suggest a good title for this department, you have chance of winning the original painting for the cover, as a prize. Thanks for the good wishes.—EDITOR.)

A CAREFUL ANALYSIS

Dear Hornig:

I was very much interested in comparing the first issue of *FUTURE FICTION* with that of *SCIENCE FICTION*. I am glad to say that FF rates better than the first issue of SF, but still not good enough. More of that later.

Cover—good. Action, sex interest, etc., all with the stf. setting lends interest, of course. As usual, the scene does not happen in the story—a weakness that can hurt sometimes.

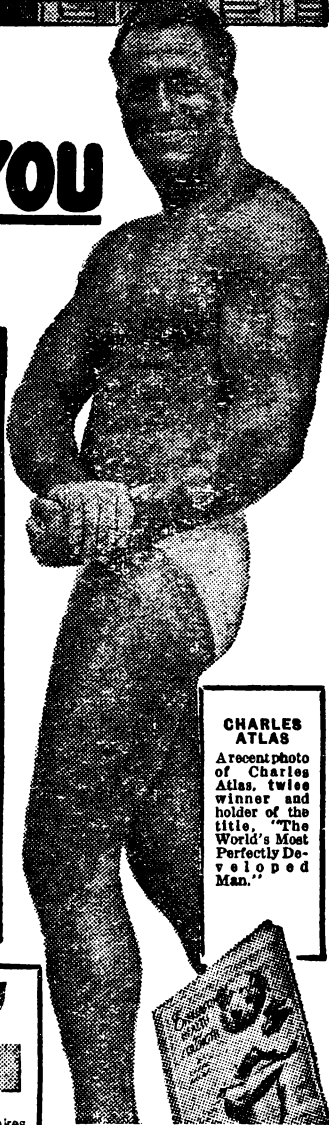
World Reborn—fair story, but it drags in spots. Characters over-intensified. However, it would rate a c-plus on a QSFL scale.

Mystery from the Stars—good plot and action. Old stuff, but very entertaining.

(Continued on page 112.)



Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?



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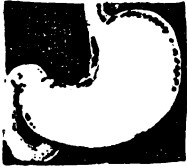
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(Continued from page 110)

B— would be a generous estimate of its rating.

Frigid Moon—good plot, action and characters. Written in the Weinbaum style. A good B.

The Disappearing Papers—good short-short. A little sketchy, but that is to be expected. A B— on this one.

The Infinite Eye—Glad to see this culture pattern reappear again. Remember that *Wonder* had two stories with the same civilization stage. Fair plot and fair work. However, a B does it justice.

The World of Tomorrow—Aren't we over-acting the world of tomorrow? Remember we must live today and from the way some things are shaping up, there may be no tomorrow!

THOMAS S. GARDNER.

P. O. Box 802, Kingsport, Tenn.

(Critical letters like this are the most helpful of all, to the editor who wants to satisfy the fans. Thanks a million, and I hope you'll give me the same service on every issue.—EDITOR.)

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JIMMY DOHERTY.

206 Pine St., Newport, Ark.

(I hope that FUTURE FICTION will continue to remain in your favor. The magazine will be made a monthly as soon as circumstances deem the action advisable.—EDITOR.)

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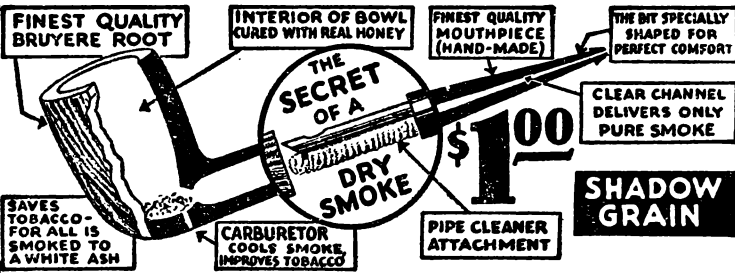


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