

MAY

MAY 1943



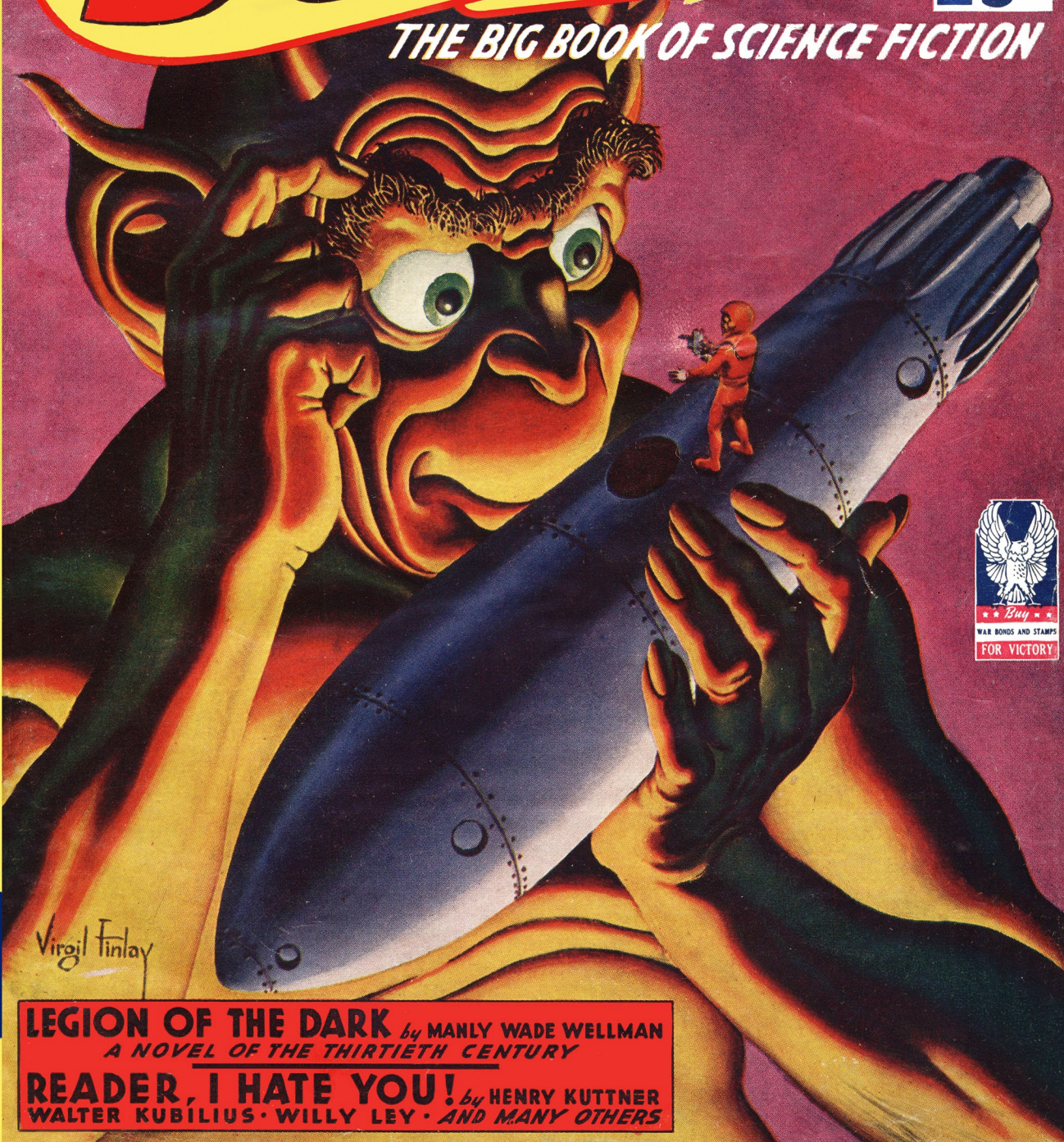
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READER, I HATE YOU! *by* HENRY KUTTNER
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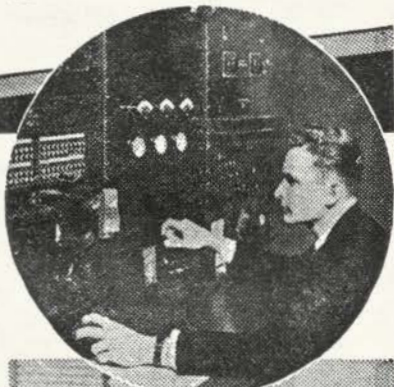
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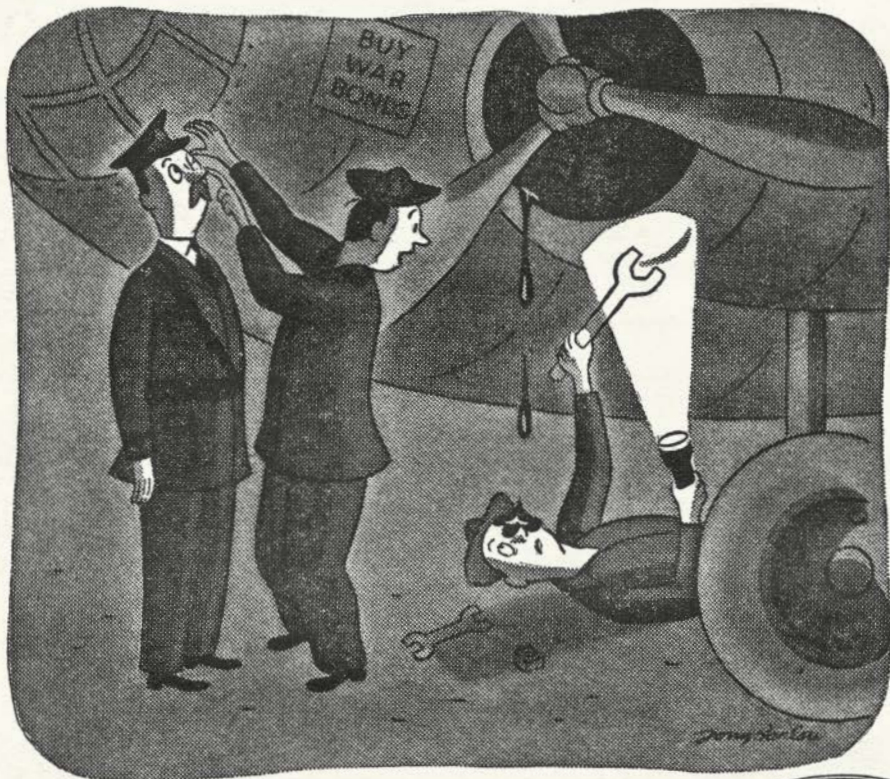
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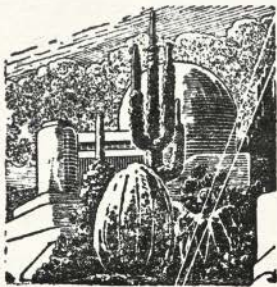
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THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 4

MAY, 1943

NO. 4

THREE SCIENCE-FICTION NOVELS



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A red-hulled spacer was blasting out from Earth to destroy him—the Rhec tribesmen were plundering his last fortress—yet Alan Lanier made no move to fight. His weapon was the mind—and he had one last trump left to play!

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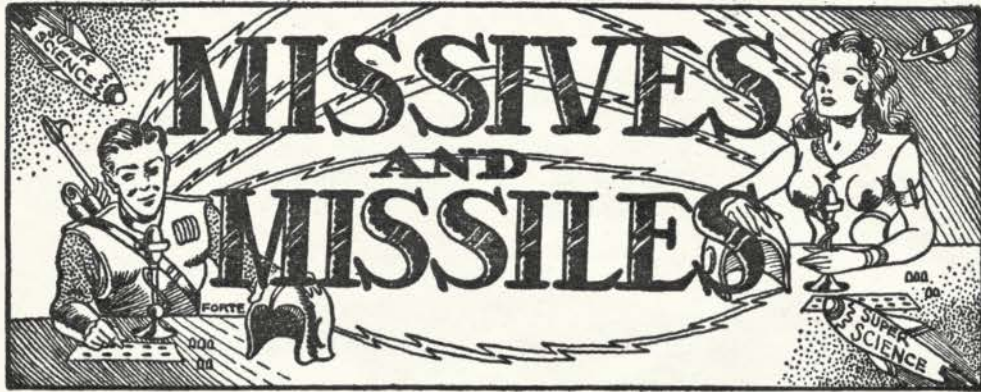
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Illustrations by Bok, Finlay, Fisk, Giunta, Knight, Lawrence and Morey.

COVER BY VIRGIL FINLAY

Illustrating "Reader, I Hate You!" by Henry Kuttner.

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How come, Mr. Zagat?

Dec. 1, 1942

Dear Sir:

I am writing this letter—whether or not it's printed—to bring out one detail that the author of *Sunward Flight* in your Feb. issue of *Super Science* isn't familiar about and that is the atomic blasting effects of the rocket-tubes.

In the story the author writes that the *Aldebaran* vanquished the *Wanderer* with her tubes blasting into the *Wanderer* thus reducing the entire ship into a unshapen molten mass. If that be the case what happens to the space-port when the ship is warming up and afterwards when it takes off into space.

The heat blast of the rocket-tubes in outer space (space-lanes where the ships ply), cannot travel very far. Space itself is a vacuum (theory) and in a vacuum heat cannot exist by force and then it needs considerable force to cause it to exist. As to the duel of the ships, the *Aldebaran* must've been within one mile of the *Wanderer* to blast it to oblivion.

To get down to Earth, where there is oxygen, the heat of the rocket-tubes expands greatly because we have an atmosphere. When the ship is ready to take-off it is necessary to build up a propulsion power in which is produced a tremendous force—intense heat; the heat that is generated exceeds to temperatures unknown. Anything within a radius of two (2) miles would be charred beyond recognition.

The proportion given here thus corresponds to the size of the *Aldebaran*.

Yours truly,
Pvt. William Sadownick, Jr.

Arthur promptly makes rebuttal

The blast from a space-ship's rocket tubes is not "heat" but heated gases and the fact that they are jetted into a vacuum would increase rather than limit the distance to which they are propelled. Moreover, since in a vacuum the gases could lose heat only by radiation they would remain at higher temperatures far longer than in atmosphere. These temperatures, by the way, would not be un-

known but given the chemical constitution of the gases could be accurately calculated by anyone familiar with physical chemistry. With regard to what would happen to a space-port as the ships blast-off, undoubtedly the rocket engineers of the future will solve that problem. The question seems to me akin to the one often asked, why isn't a stomach digested by the acids and enzymes that dissolve the food put into it?

Cordially,
Arthur Leo Zagat

A friendly gesture from overseas

Dec. 12, 1942

Dear Mr. Norton:

As a token of the gratitude felt by British fandom for your really notable generosity in providing a number of representative British fans with free copies of *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories* it has been decided to make you an honorary member of the above society. We trust that you will accept this humble testament of our esteem. Small honour though it be, it is the only one in our power to offer you.

We enclose your membership card and a copy of our prospectus setting out the functions and aspirations of our society.

With the most sincere wishes for your happiness and prosperity during the coming year.

Yours very sincerely,
D. R. Smith, Secretary

Attention, Mr. Pavey!

Banff, Alta.
Dec. 4, 1943

Dear Editor:

For many years I have found *Astonishing Stories*, now *Super Science*, a pleasant bi-monthly relaxation. Some of your stories it is true, have not been up to par, but on the whole, I have found *Super Science* an enjoyable magazine, and well above the average standard of most science-fiction mags. And although the govt. has rationed tires, butter, sugar and tea, etc., as long as *S. Science* mag. remains

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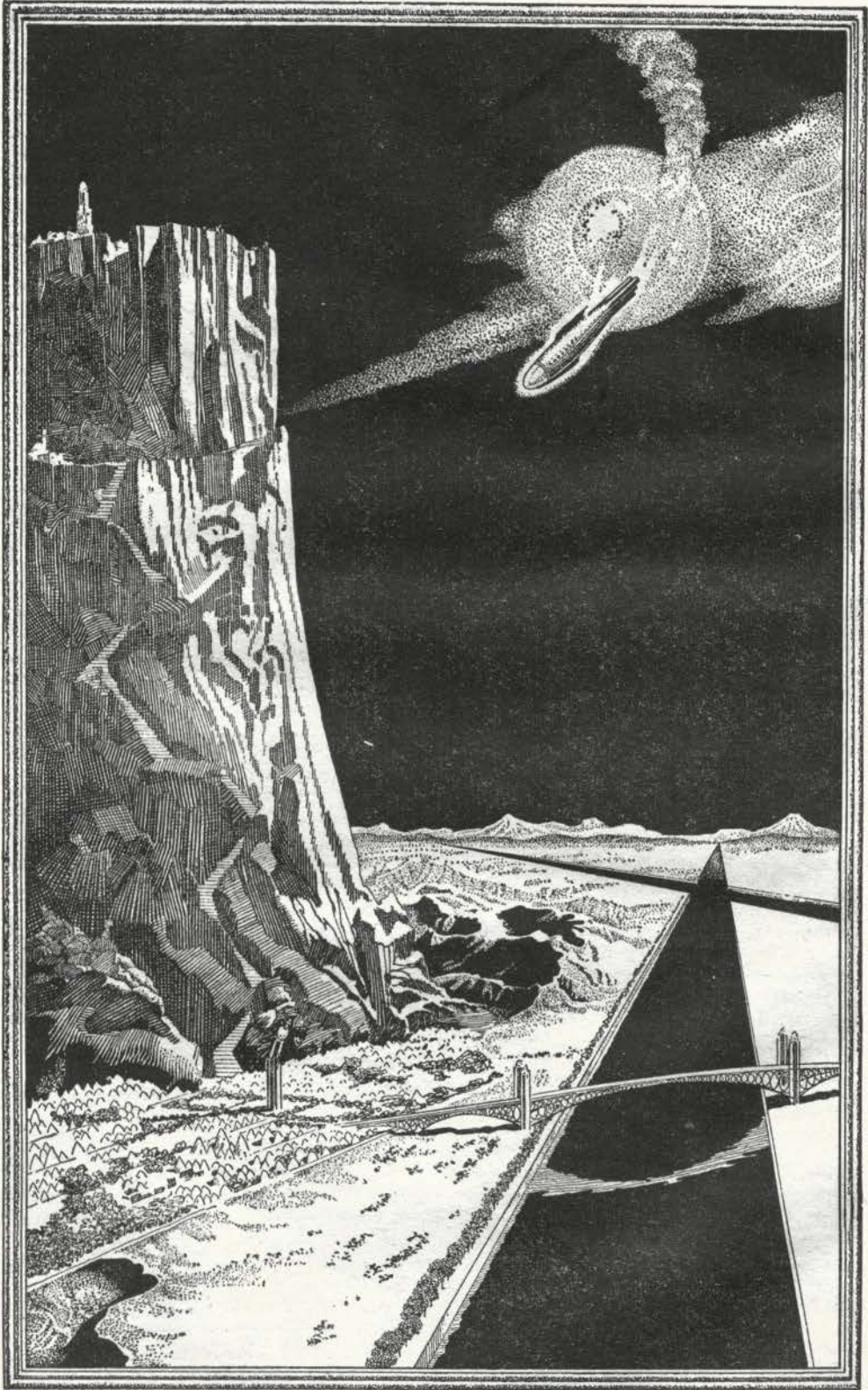
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THE ANGULAR STONE

By HENRY HASSE

A red-hulled spacer was blasting out from Earth to destroy him—the plundering Rhec tribesmen threatened to annihilate his last fortress—yet Alan Lanier refused to fight. His one weapon was the mind—and no thing of matter can stand before it!

CHAPTER ONE

GIRL OF THE GLORIANS

A SINGLE strident note penetrated Alan's consciousness. He sat half erect, listening, not even sure that he was awake. The sound was not repeated. Alan closed weary eyes and sank back down again, to be engulfed by the phantasms that troubled his restless sleep. . . .

He was again on Earth. A dull sun rose, flooding with pale amber the broken granite structures of the deserted city. Then he was eighty feet beneath, in the invulnerable offices of the Commander. There the soft, all-pervading lights heralded the dawn of 1950. The new year had arrived, but in the upper world of the great cities there was no one to greet it. The hellish para-tuotrol had left New York a mad shambles, Washington a ghostly city, proud Chicago a pile of gray rubble beside the heaving lake.

The Commander was pacing to and

fro, silently, the thickness of the rug absorbing the sounds of his nervous marathon. At last he sighed and stopped. His eyes grew dark as they rested on the immense globe in a corner that recorded the titanic struggle on air, land and sea that was altering the face of the earth itself.

"John," the Commander said softly.

At once a screen lighted, and the haggard face of a young man looked into the Commander's eyes. "Yes, Eminence?" He too was a scientist of the first order, although much younger than the thin gray-haired man with the colorless eyes and permanent limp, known simply as the Commander.

"The *America* will have its trial flight tomorrow, John. You have the list of those scientists who will accompany Captain Lanier?"

"Yes, Eminence." The scientist on the screen seemed to hesitate, a frown creased his brow. "But we're not sure of Professor Ulmer. Despite his being our greatest metallurgist, he is too—too—

shall we say, mercurial? His cerebrothalamic coördinates have not been thoroughly ascertained. There's an element of holding back, of—of evasion, Eminence."

"What do you fear from Ulmer?" The Commander's voice was casual, almost indifferent.

"Perhaps disloyalty, Eminence." The voice sank to a mere whisper. "We have found among his effects equations in a new system of mathematics he has never submitted to the Presidium!"

"I've studied them." With a wry smile the Commander waved away the copies of the equations shown on the telescreen. "We have the master plans of the *America*, and the formula for the new fuel. Nothing must interfere with this flight to Mars. And—" he added impressively—"Dr. DeHarries will accompany the flight."

"DeHarries!" It was a wail rather than an exclamation that came from the telescreen. "But, Eminence, he was invited as you commanded. He refused point-blank. The man's temper—it's atavistic. I shan't attempt to repeat his language to you. He said his place was here, where he's needed, not on some blanket-blank trip to—"

"I've heard it," the Commander smiled, although on his lined features were mirrored the awful worries and responsibilities for the safety of three hundred million people. "I have since had a personal talk with Dr. DeHarries. He agrees that his place certainly is with the flight and not here."

The gigantic tele-globe had become fluorescent as it recorded a titanic battle over the Pacific. There the fleets of the Black dictator who had ravaged Europe and Africa, joined the merciless yellow hordes of the Asiatic empire in a concerted attack upon the fleets of the American Hemispheric Coalition. Only three governments remained on Earth: the Black under the Teutonic overlord, the Yellow under the Asiatic power and the Blue, making a last stand against them with all the inventive genius of America and the immense resources of North and South American continents mobilized as the frightful destruction grew apace.

"Have Dr. DeHarries aboard when the *America* departs," the Commander smiled. "It's a command." There was a universe of power in his voice, yet he said it very quietly indeed. . . .

A GAIN that piercing shriek that held no fear, only an animal note of rage, cleaved a path through his dreams and sent Alan Lanier sitting bolt upright in the yielding metal *Llonja*, still confused from dreams of scenes forgotten for the last two years.

Now he was awake. He listened to the familiar Martian night sounds—the slow, steady throb of the disintegrators coming up the mine shafts a hundred yards away. He heard the nocturnal calls of the Kra, the golden suicide birds, sweeping over the canal at the base of the cliff below. And nearer still, the pleasant and subdued clatter of utensils in the kitchen, where he knew the faithful Zotah was preparing supper. Familiar sounds, all of these; but the sound that had awakened him hadn't been a familiar one. It seemed to linger in his ears.

Nonchalantly Alan flung aside the cape of golden plumes and swung his legs to the floor. He gasped as the dry chill of the Martian night struck him.

And at that instant the sound came again—a woman's shriek, followed by the splintering crash of bak-glass.

All sounds ceased. Even the suicide birds away down by the canal had abruptly stopped their shrilling, as if they too had heard, and wondered.

Alan didn't wonder—not now. His lips went a little tight and he muttered something that might have been a curse or a sigh. He dressed with deft, precise motions, but he didn't particularly hurry. His smoothly muscled limbs and dark hair, tumbling over contrasting gray eyes, proclaimed his Ozark mountaineer ancestry. Certain men with whom he worked had seen those eyes become dark too, on occasion.

Not yet thirty, Alan Lanier was first engineer and vice-commander of the growing colony of Earthmen. He had been on Mars since their first flight on the *America* two years ago. Here on this ore-veined Martian mesa they had found that which they sought—presential, a metal which, when processed and shipped to Earth, could withstand the unbelievable pressures to which the cities of the American Coalition were subjected far beneath the Earth's crust. Now, with new and deadly weapons fashioned from presential, the tide of the titanic battle on Earth was turning in favor of the Coalition.

As Alan strode for the door his lips quirked in a tight smile and his eyes

went a little cloudy as he thought of Thurla. *Damned little vixen!* he thought annoyedly. *Of all the times for her to settle her scores. . . .*

He wondered who was in for it this time, and chuckled sardonically as he thought of Thurla's super-emotional Martian temper.

Then he had left the Engineer's House, and with a long unhurried stride was crossing the shiny quartz road toward Thurla's little pavilion. *Why did I ever let her move up here so close to the mine, anyway?* Alan asked himself—without thinking of the obvious answer.

His querulous thoughts ceased abruptly, as a voice reached him—a man's voice in dry, colorless tones, vaguely familiar. With a burst of speed Alan went up the metal steps of the little dwelling. He entered in time to hear Thurla's high Martian sibilants.

"No, Khosan—never! I'm staying here, understand? For the last time—keep away from me!"

AT ALAN'S entrance the man in the room whirled, startled, poised as if to leap. Khosan was taller by five inches than Alan's own six feet. His skin was the coppery-golden hue of the Glorian race of Martians. But now his handsome face seemed a shade paler as his violet eyes swam with fury.

He seemed oblivious of the gash on his forehead, dripping blood. Alan's gaze darted to Thurla, standing tensely there with the jagged neck of a vase in her hand.

"Get out, Khosan!" Alan's words crackled like icy javelins. Beneath the dark hair his eyes were flecked with electric sparks.

Imperceptibly the Glorian moved. It was a slight shifting of his weight, merely, and simultaneously Khosan's hand moved up his side toward his belt.

Alan knew that trick by heart; he'd seen an Earthman killed by it once.

Alan exploded into action so incredibly swift that it seemed a single blurred movement. His left foot caught the Glorian behind the knee at the same second his fist crashed into the coppery jaw. But Glorians are swifter than Earthmen can ever hope to be, and Alan felt as if a nova had exploded near his ribs an instant before Khosan slumped to the floor.

Alan stared dumbly down at the tiny, but deadly, heat tube that fell from

Khosan's fingers. Despite the pounding pain at his side, Alan bent wearily and with a heave jerked the Glorian up by the collar of his garment and pitched him outdoors.

Then Alan turned, swayed a little and heard Thurla's sobbing cry—"Alan!"

He looked at her with a sickly sort of smile. He'd never seen her like this before, her disheveled, tawny mane, only a shade darker than the bare golden shoulder over which it tumbled; the dark violet eyes now soft and anguish-tinged.

"Oh, Alan, your side—you're hurt!" She whirled into another alcove and returned with a jeweled case from which she extracted a deep purple unguent to smear on his wound.

"That damned Khosan!" Thurla was muttering as she knelt at Alan's side. "I'll—I'll proscribe him for this to the ends of Mars!"

She was a priestess and could mete out the dreadful punishment wherein the proscribed one ceases to exist. No Glorian would speak to, hear or even see a proscribed one.

Thurla was speaking English, as she always did when with Alan. "To the ends of Mars!" she repeated fiercely.

"Shouldn't be so vengeful," Alan gasped through pain-clenched teeth. "After all, Khosan still is your husband, even if he is a renegade. What'd he want up here, anyway?"

"Me! He said the Rhecarians are massing. He wanted me to go away with him to safety; claims I'm still his wife."

"Yes," Alan nodded. "We've been expecting trouble from the Rhecs for weeks. Now it looks as if it's come. What about Khosan—has he dropped so low as to join the Rhecarians?"

THURLA shrugged. She rose to face him beseechingly. "Alan, no one knows better than I how much you Earthmen have helped my people. You have brought us new hope, and the gift of a great culture—your arts and science and music, and, most of all, protection against the Rhecarians. But Alan—all this is nothing compared to what you have brought to *me!*"

She ended with a tense little sob in her throat, leaning forward against him. Alan felt her softness and was aware of the delightful, pungent scent of her hair as it brushed his cheek. His hands touched her arms and moved lightly up their sculptured length. Their throbbing

and their warmth seemed to thrill him.

Thurla pressed forward, lips trembling, violet eyes wide and waiting. The jewelled unguent case clattered to the floor and the spell was broken.

Alan saw more than the violet loveliness of her eyes. He looked deep and saw the queerly dilating pupils, and the other darker substance that never failed to remind him these Martians were strange and nocturnal-visioned—and alien.

He tore his eyes away and pushed her from him.

"You almost did it again, you little cat!" Alan whispered hoarsely. Then he laughed aloud. "I'll say one thing—there's never a dull moment since you moved up here to the mine."

Like a cat she was leaping at him, claws reaching out for his face. "You would laugh at me!" she gasped in fury. "Other men here desire me—and you treat me as a child!"

One sharp nail left its mark on Alan's cheek, before he caught her arms again. He held her as she struggled until she was exhausted, then gently released her. Thurla fell in a little heap on the floor.

As he stepped away Alan said quietly, "No, not as a child, Thurla."

He strode for the door and was half way through it when she snatched up the jagged neck of the vase and hurled it at him. It shattered against the wall a hair's breadth from his head.

Alan walked out into the Martian night, not looking back.

ALAN didn't go back to the Engineer's House. The searing wound in his side was throbbing awfully now, and he knew he'd have to see Dr. DeHarries at once. Picking out the quartz trail easily in Phobos' full moon glow, he followed it across the upper slope of the mesa toward the doctor's dwelling. The purple sweep of Martian sky seemed different tonight than he had ever seen it. A little darker, a little brooding, as if he were seeing it through a vast shadow.

A shadow was on his mind. Dark events were brewing.

Remembering what Thurla had said concerning Khosan, and the impending Rhecarian attack, he wondered if Khosan had really aligned himself with those fierce, black tribes who had ever been a scourge on this planet. He hoped not, for Khosan was an organizer. Since his banishment by the Glorian Council be-

cause of his open resentment of the Earthmen, he had let it be known that he would return.

If only they'd known sooner, Alan thought bitterly. How could they prepare an adequate defense now? Weapons were few and, what was worse, Superintendent Ulmer would advise flight at the first sign of real danger. That might be possible for the few hundred Earthmen, but how could they evacuate the thousands of Glorians and their families? Ulmer had always been stolidly indifferent to the Glorians' plight. The thought gagged Alan, but he banished it as he reached the crown of the mesa where he must pass between the encroaching tangle of taajos trees.

Up here, as always, Alan felt as if he were walking in a dream. Close at hand he could hear the tinkling of the metallic taajos leaves. Tiny red eyes, peering at him from a tangle of foliage, disappeared as a coppery furred kaladonis slunk away. And once he heard a single "Gee!" as the quizzical call of a Gee-bird, as the Earthmen called them, sounded shrilly; then he glimpsed its greenish eyes, big as saucers, winging down toward the canal below.

Alan drew in a deep breath despite the pounding pain in his side. Far out over the Red Desert he had seen the smooth darkness suddenly shattered by a patch of moving light.

"One of the Colors again," he murmured. "Wonder if we Earthmen will ever get used to them—or understand them?" These huge, mile-wide blobs of pure color had ever been a mystery to the Earthmen, and the Glorians refused to speak of them. The Colors criss-crossed over the desert at will, coming out of nowhere and vanishing just as mysteriously. Although these patches of light had so far remained intangible and harmless, the Earthmen had never gotten over their horror of the phantasmal, polychromatic things.

The path turned abruptly to the left, and the great Glorian temple seemed to spring up miragelike before Alan's eyes. He had never ceased to marvel at this piece of architecture. It was more than that. It was poetry in line and color.

Fashioned of the incredibly light yet almost indestructible presential, its shimmering height under Phobos' glow seemed to sweep upward in a gesture that excluded all points or angles, as everything melted into the delicately curved dome

that topped the structure. How many millenia it had stood there, not even the Glorians knew.

Alan hurried forward, skirting the temple toward the brink of the abyss that dropped sheerly down to the desert. Here, at the very cliff edge, Dr. DeHarries made his home.

It was known to the Glorians as the house of beauty. It had been one of the larger, elaborately carved houses of a stone resembling chrysophrase, used by the assistants to the high priest ages ago. It overlooked the Glorian town nestling between the cliff and the canal below. The only priest here now, of course, was Akkamin, who continued to officiate in the ancient rituals despite Superintendent Ulmer's will.

The Earthmen's disintegrators had bored a honeycomb of galleries beneath the entire cliff—making the temple unsafe, according to Ulmer. But the Processional Stairway still zigzagged down the cliff side to the town below. Every so often, unpredictably, the Glorians climbed to the temple to participate in a chanting ceremonial the Earthmen could never understand.

It was a monotonous, unmusical harping on certain vibrations, the effect of which was to bring several of the perambulating Colors to the scene—but for what, the Earthmen never knew.

Within the temple, Thurla had whispered once to Alan, was the eternal Angular Stone. Then she had fallen silent in an ecstasy of fear.

CHAPTER TWO

RAY OF LIFE

HE REACHED the doctor's home, where three immense rooms were used as infirmary and hospital. DeHarries could usually be found here, when not visiting his patients in the town below. Now Alan glimpsed the doctor standing on the side balustrade, enveloped in a cloak of shimmering Kra plumes.

"Oh, it's you. Come in, Alan." DeHarries peered at him through the semi-darkness. "Anything the matter?"

"Plenty!" The urgency in his tone was enough for DeHarries, who motioned him into the lighted office. By now Alan felt as if a million hot little hammers were pounding at his side. The skin there seemed stuck to his clothes, and he leaned

unconsciously sidewise to avoid this.

DeHarries noticed this and said crisply, "You're hurt. We'll attend to that immediately."

One look at the raw burn and he whistled between set teeth. "Heat beam, eh?" He looked sharply at Alan. "I'm afraid this calls for the high-intensity cauterizing ray. Think you can stand it for three seconds?"

"Go ahead, Doc. It's worth it."

DeHarries wheeled out a small cabinet on which were pyramided a series of bak-glass tubes. Insulated wires led to a portable cone of the new presential, the only metal capable of withstanding the atomic concentrations. He pressed several buttons and tube after tube hummed into life, a strange glowing emanation swirling into them.

Carefully lifting the cone by its bak-glass handle, DeHarries tested the ray's intensity against a sheet of presential. Alan watched in fascination.

"Naturally," DeHarries said soothingly, "you can't take the full force of this. No man could. Yet the ray has to be at full concentration to neutralize the effects of a heat beam at close range. . . ."

Alan nodded, listening to the pleasant voice. And as so often happened, he couldn't believe that it came out of that face. It was a firm and solid countenance, with a perpetual tightness of the jaw and a hint of a hurt look in the dark eyes. Alan remembered what a cataract of laughter his theories of the mind and brain exploration had elicited from the scientists of Earth. He also had heard rumors of his experiments, and finally the book that had caused the Commander to send him to Mars to avoid a scientist's war at a moment when the American Coalition was fighting for life. . . .

"Therefore," DeHarries was saying, "we always use a presential shield, which absorbs most of the heat yet lets the concentration through." He unobtrusively was slipping a paper-thin sheet of presential with a special frame against Alan's side, at the same time aiming the miraculous cone. He released the trigger.

Before Alan could even think, he felt as if a thousand rocket blasts had hit him all at once. A sickening surge shrieked along his nerves, his teeth snapped together and he swayed forward, pain and shock mirrored on his face.

"Steady there!" DeHarries grasped both of his arms and held him erect until

he caught his breath. "It's all over. Now you'll have the reaction, but it'll pass."

"Thanks!" Alan managed to gasp. And suddenly the shrieking agony in his nerves was gone, and a deepening coolness grew in the wound until his side felt as if sheathed in ice.

Alan lifted the cone and examined it, a strange new light in his eyes. An idea was growing within him.

"A wonderful thing, this cauterizer."

"But sometimes I regret having invented it," the doctor said thoughtfully. "The agony's more than most men can bear, and here in this Martian atmosphere most Earth anesthetics turn deadly. I wonder what causes it," he ruminated. "Here, drink this." He placed an exquisite *patralene* cup, almost as ancient as the temple, before Alan. It was abrim with a sparkling pale blue liquid.

"Thassalian!" Alan exclaimed in amazement. "Forbidden to Earthmen, and impossible to get from the Glorians!"

"Not impossible, as you can see." The faintest trace of a smile flitted and was gone. "To hell with the forbidden part. Drink it." Alan did. It had a fragrance like cape jasmynes, and it was like drinking distilled energy.

"Now, tell me all about it," DeHarries said laconically. He glanced at Alan's wounded side.

ALAN placed his knotted fists on the little table before him, and leaned forward tensely.

"Khosan," he said with deliberate slowness.

"Khosan." The doctor's face was like carved marble. "So he dared come back here. Did you get him, Alan?"

"No. He's probably far away by now; I let him go."

"But that renegade—you should've held him. You know Superintendent Ulmer wants him. The man's a definite menace."

"And give Ulmer the satisfaction of crucifying the man? The fool would do that in his clumsy way, and turn every Glorian's face away from us. Why, every Earthman on Mars would be proscribed, just when they're beginning to tolerate and understand us. Besides, I have my own ideas as to who's diverting the ore shipments and why. Yes, I know—" Alan held up a hand as DeHarries tried to interrupt. "I know Ulmer claims Khosan has been stealing the ore. But after all, it's *their* presential!"

"But Khosan, our irreconcilable enemy. If he's loose now. . . ."

"Matters haven't changed," Alan broke in, "except in our favor. I gave him his life—he's given us a warning. We're even. He sneaked back this evening to get Thurla away from here and told her the Rhecarians are massing for an attack. Probably he's in on it as a revenge for being banished. I don't know. But I'm putting it to you plainly—if those black, yellow-eyed devils break through—"

"Yes, I know what we can expect." DeHarries whirled, began pacing the narrow office. He turned sharply, and for the first time in months Alan saw a show of emotion on the man's face. "Well, Alan, I have a surprise for you," he laughed mirthlessly. "The crowning touch of all. My family arrived here this morning."

"Your family—here! But I thought you told them to remain in V'Narol? Good lord, man, why didn't you—"

"Keep them from coming? How? I didn't know they intended to. You know the radio's no good with that magnetic storm over the desert. They couldn't advise me. As it is, they just barely made it in one of the planes. Besides," the doctor said dryly, "you don't know my daughter when she makes up her mind to something. She has the nearest thing to a coördinator's intellect, and she wraps her mother around her little finger."

"Your wife and daughter." Alan strode, grim-faced, to the bak-glass window and gazed out at the night sky. "Damn it, DeHarries, I'm sorry your family's in this mess. But I'm not only thinking of them, now. What about the thousands of Glorians down there in the town? Isolated women and children? And we up here with no chance to radio V'Narol while the magnetic storm's on!"

"Not that it would do any good to radio," DeHarries said. "We can't depend on the Glorian government to act. Well, we've several hundred Earthmen working the mines. They'd be pitifully few against the Rhec hordes even if we had enough weapons—which we don't."

"Maybe I should have held on to Khosan after all," Alan admitted. "No use crying about that now. He's clever and ambitious. He probably figures that if the Rhecarians can take this mesa and the mines, he can use the mines as a base for later and stronger attacks on V'Narol." Alan passed a hand over his eyes. "I've got to clear my mind and think!"

"Have you any idea where the tribes are massing, Alan?"

"The logical place would be the foothills of the Kaarj Mountains, to the north of here, where our canal passes through. It'd be suicide trying to hunt them out now. If Khosan's leading them, they'd have ambushes galore. However, I've taken things more or less into my own hands, since Ulmer doesn't want to act; I've had scouts out in that direction for the past week. They should be in by early morning—if they finally get through!"

"I wonder what Ulmer—" DeHarries began.

"You needn't wonder. I can tell you what his decision will be—flight! At least flight for the Earthmen, or part of them, and leave the rest to their fate. Of course, we haven't counted on the Glorians. They've been meeting the menace of the Rhecarians for ages in their own way. I wonder what they'll do now that the tribes are really armed!"

"In any event," the doctor said grimly, "if Ulmer orders flight I wish you'd take matters into your own hands, Alan. I know most of the men will stick by you. Ah, well—come in and meet the family." Then suddenly, "Damn Cleo and her curiosity, anyway! She says she only wanted to see what we were doing at the mine. Why couldn't they have stayed in V'Narol where they're safe, with the rest of the men's families?"

Alan laughed. "Don't worry, Doc. Things are never as dark as they're painted." He was fingering the cone of the B-11 ray, examining it idly. "We can put up a damn good battle, Khosan or no Khosan. Wish we could rig up some sort of a directional beam powered by that B-11 intensity concentration—*without* presential shields!"

"Eh?" DeHarries whirled, saw the cone in Alan's hand. Both men gazed at each other in delighted silence as the idea grew and grew.

EVERY time Alan entered the DeHarries living room, he could not help but stand in silent wonder before the ancient tapestries covering its walls. They seemed endless in the immense room that took up nearly half the entire abode. But what held him spellbound was the three-dimensional effect they gave, as if each one were a window on a new horizon.

They were small miracles against the

walls. Undoubtedly of religious origin, their intricate design and vivid color paled into insignificance the most prized Gobelin or Oriental. Nothing in the room had been changed. The strange pentagonal stools and low couches covered with now extinct mermerium furs, the Martian seal of long-forgotten icy flakes, so fine and vari-hued as to resemble peacock's plumage; and the multiple star-clustered lights that diffused illumination. In a corner by the odd, swinging Glorian windows stood a small piano, the only Earth touch. Only because of the music had the Glorians given DeHarries the abode.

Many times Alan had stood outside these windows, among the massed Glorians, listening in the night while DeHarries played. He had watched the Martians leave afterwards, hushed and trembling, with a strange new appreciation in their violet eyes.

Now, as they entered the living room, Alan heard the resonant gongs speaking from the temple across the way. Soon, he knew the Glorians would begin coming up the Stairway in the cliff, to gather in the temple for another ceremonial which so puzzled the Earthmen. Only once before had Alan known them to come up here at night. They must be perturbed about something.

Then he was forced to forget the gong as he crossed the room and found himself being introduced to Mrs. DeHarries and her daughter, Cleo.

The older woman, although somewhat stout, still retained traces of loveliness, especially in her smile and the very large and very brown eyes. Then Alan looked at the girl and saw the same eyes—but not the smile. Against the alabaster of her face the lips were cold. Alan wondered why. He marveled at her slenderness, bordering on fragility. There was something tragic about her, something withdrawn and aloof which, paradoxically, he found appealing.

"I don't suppose there's any need to ask you how you like it up here," Alan smiled at the girl. "Must seem like exile after Earth, and even V'Narol."

"On the contrary," Cleo said quietly. "I find it very exciting and lovely. There is a thrill in living outdoors again, after years in the cities below the surface."

"I was dreaming about the Earth tonight. Odd, how dreams—"

"We all like it very much here," Mrs. DeHarries exclaimed. "Except for that!"

She waved an aristocratic hand toward the window, and Alan realized the temple ceremony had begun, a sustained chanting on two or three notes.

"Oh, you'll get used to it very soon, my dear," DeHarries told her. "It's not a daily occurrence—in fact, this is only the first or second time they've ever come up here at night." He glanced uncomfortably at Alan. The latter was staring at the girl, marveling at her voice which was limpid, crystal clear, yet had the same quality of detachment and indifference he'd noticed about her.

"HOW long had you planned to stay?" He voiced the thought uppermost in his mind.

"Heaven knows!" Mrs. DeHarries answered. "The atomplane pilot had a terrible time getting above the magnetic storm, which almost ruined our motors, he said. And I understand these storms last for days and even weeks."

"We'll do our very best to entertain you." Alan turned to the girl. "Would you care for a flying trip along our canal?"

"Yes, I think I'd like that."

"You'll love it." Alan was enthusiastic. "We're proud of our canal. It's one of the main ones leading down from the polar cap. It's beautiful from the air, with miles of vegetation on each side—a riot of color. And the Kras, wait till you see them! We call them the suicide birds. This is their mating season, and the males—the gorgeous golden ones—soar upward in pursuit of the females. Then to show off their strength and prowess, they keep on soaring higher and higher, myriads of them in a golden cloud against the sky. At a certain height the atmosphere is so tenuous that their lungs burst and they die, and come plunging down in a golden rain." He paused, aware that he had become almost poetic.

"Oh, how marvelous!" Mrs. DeHarries clasped her hands. "How beautiful. We simply must see that."

"How awful," Cleo said, looking at the heap of Kra plumes on the couches.

They were interrupted by a knock at the door. DeHarries went to open it.

Alan heard a Martian voice asking, "Is Vice-Commander Lanier here?" There was an exchange of sibilants. Then a Glorian, one of the workers at the mine, entered. He caught sight of Alan and said, "Commander Ulmer wishes to speak to the vice-commander at his home."

"Very well. Tell Ulmer I'll see him presently." Alan arose reluctantly, murmuring an apology for having to leave so soon.

"Oh, but you must dine with us tonight. Would eight be convenient?" Mrs. DeHarries invited.

"Yes, please do," Cleo seconded. She didn't sound too enthusiastic, Alan noted.

"It will be a great pleasure." He looked deliberately at the girl. "At eight, then. I don't think Commander Ulmer will keep me long."

DeHarries accompanied him to the door. "Do you suppose Ulmer's gotten wind of Khosan coming back here?"

"Perhaps, Doctor. But Ulmer has known for some time that this Rhecarian attack was brewing. I think it's something else he wants to see me about tonight." Alan smiled grimly.

"All right. But please be careful, lad."

ONCE outside he could hear the ceremonial at the temple, a little louder now. The stairway was deserted as Alan walked toward it. Ulmer's home was halfway down these stairs, on a gigantic ledge whence a tunnel led through the cliff to the mine proper. Strategic, Alan had often thought.

He found Ulmer waiting for him in the library, waving a pudgy hand in greeting to the younger man.

"Sit down, Alan. Have a cigar? Earth's best."

Alan waved it away. "No, thanks, not in this thin atmosphere." He sat down beside the desk, stretching his long legs out in an attitude of perfect comfort. But he wasn't comfortable. He had never been, where Ulmer was concerned. Even on Earth, Alan had raised a cynical but silent eyebrow when the Commander had selected Ulmer.

"You no doubt remember," Ulmer said, "how we worked out our schedule here. Well—we're behind."

He rummaged in a desk drawer, and produced a sheaf of papers. "When the next spacer arrives from Earth, a month hence, there'll be the government snoopers as usual to see that we're ready with the allotment of presential. So—I've made up our regular report. If you'll just co-sign it with me. . . ."

He pushed the papers over to Alan with a too-careful nonchalance.

Alan hardly glanced at the papers. He was staring, expressionless, at the squat

metallurgist whose lips curved in what for him was a pleasant smile.

"You," Alan said slowly, "are Commander here, Ulmer. It's just an honorary title, like mine. There's only one Commander—back on Earth. Suppose you explain your shortage to him! Presential is not just a metal, it's the difference between life and death for the millions in the Coalition whose cities are destroyed and who must live below the surface. It's the only known protection against the action of para-tuotrol. As it is, our production has been pitifully small!"

"But you're wrong, Lanier." Ulmer was struggling with his features. "There's no shortage. It's just that all these rumors of Rhecarian uprisings have got the men jittery and production has fallen behind. I've figured it all out very carefully here on the report. If you'll sign it with me—mere routine. . . ."

He pushed the papers across the desk with a pudgy forefinger.

But Alan shook his head and his smile was thin and dangerous when he spoke. "Funny thing, Ulmer, but my private records don't jibe with this at all. Mine show that we've topped schedule during the past several months. Of course, I

haven't looked in on the ore reserves lately, but I've got the figures on 'em. I do believe one of your statements, though—that you've figured it all out very carefully."

Ulmer's cigar stopped halfway to his capacious mouth. His black eyes glittered. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, hell! Do I have to tell *you*? Months ago I discovered that secret tunnel of yours leading back along the abandoned canal wall. My only mistake was in thinking I had plenty of time for looking into it!"

"You've gone far enough, Lanier!"

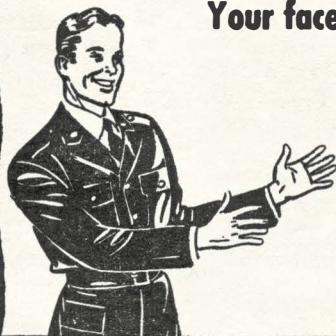
"For instance—" Alan leaned forward casually—"the Teuton government of Earth landed a spacer up here near the polar cap and found a lot of presential waiting for them. Yes, I know they were hot on the track of our fuel formula—and with a rat like you in the confidence of our Commander, I suppose they have it by now."

Ulmer half arose but sat down again. "You're talking gibberish, Lanier. Anyway, my report stays as written."

"To hell with the report. That's your problem."

Ulmer nodded in agreement. He

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4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges

jammed the frayed end of the cigar back into his face which had taken on a satisfied, complacent look.

"Listen, Lanier. You can be a fool or you can be plenty smart. There's enough in this for both of us, a hell of a lot more than you'd ever dream of! After all, one day there's going to be a Commander on Mars!"

In a long sinuous movement Alan seemed to uncoil from where he sat. His hand was at his belt before Ulmer could stir.

Then the vibration at the top of his brain was with him again; the eerie sensation which Alan had felt on only two other occasions since his arrival on Mars. It seemed tripled in intensity now, staying his hand and paralyzing his will. It lasted an instant, and was gone.

The two men stared at each other in silence. Then Alan crumpled the unsigned report and tossed it contemptuously across the desk at Ulmer. He walked out of the room without a backward glance.

In his sputtering rage Ulmer had risen too, his chair toppling over. He stared at Alan's retreating figure—and suddenly his rage was gone. He took the mangled remains of the cigar from his teeth and thoughtfully placed it in the tray. He stood there, quite still for several minutes. His livid features slowly regained their florid hue, and a tight, humorless smile began to crease his lips.

CHAPTER THREE

ENTER THE COLOR-FOLK!

OUTSIDE, and all the way back up the Stairway Alan felt the strange sensation in his brain as if unaccustomed vibrations were trying to break through. It gave him the feeling of something impending, something urgent that he couldn't quite grasp. Far out over the desert against the purple Martian night he could see one of the mile-wide color shapes hovering—strangely still and unusually close, as if waiting and watching. Finally with an effort he shook off the eerie feeling, as he arrived at the DeHarries home.

Alan noticed as he entered that George Marlowe and Bill Siefert, the two young atomic engineers, had already arrived. Marlowe was engaged in serious talk with the doctor. No doubt they were discussing the impending Rhecarian attack.

As though his entrance were a signal—"Dinner is served," Mrs. DeHarries said brightly, and took Alan's arm. She led the way to the table set opposite the windows.

A little flood of annoyance came over Alan as he saw Siefert monopolizing Cleo. It was hard enough to work with the man day after day without having to take him in social doses too! Alan had never trusted him; there seemed too close an understanding between Siefert and Ulmer. But on being seated, Alan was placated a little, as Mrs. DeHarries placed him next to Cleo, with Marlowe and Siefert opposite, and herself and the doctor at the foot and head of the table respectively.

The table itself was a surprise to the men who were not used to the feminine touch. There were sheer linens from V'Narol, and a candelabrum of exquisite Glorian workmanship. The dishes too were of priceless Glorian alloys. But most precious and welcome of all, were the hoary bottles of vintage wines from Earth, which Cleo had brought along. And over all hovered the cacophony of the temple, as the chant across the way rose higher.

De Harries resumed his conversation with Marlowe. "Of course, I'd always thought we were as safe here as at V'Narol, but now—"

Alan glanced quickly at the two women, then sharply at the Doctor. DeHarries noticed it.

"They already know about it," he said. "I told them. They had to know sooner or later."

Mrs. DeHarries nodded, smiling sweetly. "Oh, yes. But tell us, Vice-Commander, are we really in such great danger from those—those Rhecarians? I've never seen any, but from what we heard in V'Narol they're really savages, without modern arms!"

Alan sighed. He had expected this. "True," he said quietly, "they are savages—nomadic tribes roaming the deserts and mountains of Mars. For centuries, while the three or four Martian governments fought each other in suicidal wars, the Rhecarians merely murdered and pillaged on a small scale whenever they had the chance—first helping one side, then the other. But finally a curious thing happened."

Mrs. DeHarries leaned forward and even Cleo looked up sharply, listening now.

"The curious thing that happened," Alan went on slowly, "concerns one of the warring Martian nations, rather than the Rhecarians. This nation, facing extinction, retreated to a vast, unknown underground system of caverns, virtually disappearing. It was a great exodus."

"But what became of them?" Mrs. DeHarries' interest was not feigned.

"Who knows? The story exists today only as legend. They could have built hidden cities within the planet, much as we have been forced to do on Earth. Weary of war and hate and killing, their avowed purpose was to eliminate all contact with the surface, until they had achieved one thing—the eradication of all emotions. All this was millenia ago, remember, and the result must have been an intellectual evolution so detached from all emotional and irrational influences as to make war something unthinkable. Meanwhile, however, the wars continued to rage on the surface, until the present Glorians are the remnants of the only nation to survive—by the sheer gift of Providence."

"THE Glorians are a strange mixture of the barbaric and the scientific," Cleo thought aloud.

"Yes, they're somewhat decadent now. Many of their ancient secrets of science and the arts are forgotten. Then, too, this nation that disappeared in order to eradicate all emotion at first tried to eradicate the emotions of the Glorians too. Music was banished under an awful penalty, until it was forgotten. Subtle biological experiments were tried, unknown to the Glorians. But as the underground nation grew intellectually, and decreased emotionally, they decided never to interfere in the affairs of any intelligent being—because to do so in itself entailed an emotional content, you see?"

"But their tampering left its mark on the Glorians, inasmuch as the emotions of the latter, having been tampered with, are not now true. They will rage like a volcano, super-emotionally for a minute; and the next day they have forgotten all about it." Alan was thinking particularly of Thurla as he said it. "It's impossible for them to hold to a consistent course of action. Mentally, they could be giants were it not that emotionally they are unpredictable. They may war on the black tribes for a few weeks and then retreat to their cities

and forget the Rhecarians. *We can't!*"

Mrs. DeHarries waved her hand airily as if dismissing all Rhecarians. "But I want to know what became of the nation that suppressed all emotion."

"You mean the Intellectuals, as we call them," DeHarries said. "They are rumored to still exist, but no one knows where. Yet you see some of their members once in a while—or almost." The doctor pointed to one of the great open windows. "See that great globe of light floating out over the desert? That is one of their coördinators."

"Coördinators!" his wife gasped the word.

"Yes. It is said that from their nation eleven are chosen. They are the coördinators. They travel within those spheres of light, which they themselves create mentally."

"But in V'Narol we heard something vague, about some sort of being called the presence," Cleo commented. "What is it?"

"The Presence?" DeHarries' brows knit into a thoughtful frown. "It's exactly that, my dear. A Presence so all-encompassing, a mind of such inconceivable power and wisdom, that its actual extension of being might very well be fourth-dimensional! Possibly it is the original leader of those Intellectuals a millenia ago. We only know that it is invisible to the Glorians and to us, and the eleven—the coördinators—are aware of it only through mental processes. They have a small part of its cosmic knowledge, after undergoing a certain treatment by which to survive the terrific mental ordeal."

"But how do you know all this?" Cleo persisted. "If none of you have seen—"

"Partly from the Glorians," replied her father, "but mainly thanks to Alan, here. He's the only Earthman ever to see one of the coördinators!"

"Oh, tell us about it!" Two pairs of curious feminine eyes fastened upon Alan. The latter glared at DeHarries, but saw there was no escape.

"WELL, the coördinator came to me in one of those globes of light. I was standing up here by the edge of the cliff one day, when I saw one of the globes far away over the desert. It came nearer and nearer with a swift whirling motion—or perhaps the whirling was illusion—until it was almost over me. It seemed a mile wide then.

I tried to run but couldn't. I was fastened there. Then it simply settled down over me and the cliff and everything else."

"How terrible!" Mrs. DeHarries gasped. "I would have died."

"It wasn't so bad. In fact, it was thrilling. There was a vivid interplay of colors all about me, and a sensation as if I were being surcharged with energy. My mind has never been so clear. Then the entire globe disappeared like a mist in the sun—and there beside me was the coördinator."

Cleo leaned tensely forward, eyes bright with interest. All her tragic indifference was forgotten. "Did he say anything? What did he look like?"

"Oh, he looked like a Glorian, but—somehow more noble, with a sort of aloof benignancy. Yet cold; I can't describe it. He stood there a few moments before he spoke, or seemed to. His lips never moved. I got the essence of what he expressed as if a flood of thought had entered my mind all at once.

"Our operations here, and our effects and influence on the lives of the Glorians, were of some intellectual interest to them. They, the coördinators, had no quarrel with the Earthmen. They were observing this phase as a new scientific and sociologic development on Mars. They would try never to interfere.

"Well, this coördinator at least retained something approaching a secret sort of amusement, or perhaps he had a reason for it beyond any of our concepts. But anyway, he gave me a flash of mental coördinates concerning the best way to mine presential that nearly knocked me unconscious! I later presented it to Ulmer as my own idea. We've been using it ever since."

"And the coördinator," Cleo said. "You never saw him again?"

"Nope. He seemed to emanate another globe of color, and in an instant he was gone. I felt charged with energy for weeks afterward. That's all."

There was a little silence for an instant, then, "Why don't these coördinators step in and do something awful to the Rhecarians?" Mrs. DeHarries wanted to know. "It would be simple for them."

"Oh, no, my dear," the doctor hastened to explain. "Have you forgotten—that would entail emotions, and they are above that. They would never step in. They only observe in their infinite wisdom all the things that happen here, all the causes and effects and subtle in-

fluences of us Earthmen, and now the new Rhecarian crisis. No doubt their mental processes eventually reach the Presence, the one supreme power here, with whom only they can communicate."

"The doctor's right," Alan said dispassionately. "Nor will the Glorian government, such as it is, ever act—even if they know about this crisis, away over in V'Narol. That leaves it squarely up to us."

Siefert, across the table, had remained silent during the discussion. Now he smiled a little and looked down into his wine glass which he twirled gently between his fingers.

DeHarries noticed it and said with a tinge of annoyance, "Siefert, here, has never believed Alan's story about the coördinator. But I do, because this is Mars and stranger things have happened. I believe even more. I believe the encounter with the coördinator was no chance one, but done deliberately because Alan has been chosen by the Eleven as our ultimate leader."

"The doctor has been harping on that since the coördinator came," Alan said uncomfortably.

"They never do anything haphazardly," DeHarries persisted. "You know the Glorian legend that the Eleven can foretell the future and will warn them of an approaching catastrophe."

"I know one thing—it's made Alan practically a deity to the Glorians," young Marlowe said, grinning without malice.

SIEFERT still smiled superciliously, twirling the wine glass.

"I'm afraid—" he abruptly changed the conversation—"that you'll find this place quite boring, Miss DeHarries, unless a coördinator comes for you!" He laughed. "However, I can show you our canal. It's something to see. I know an enchanted cove up the canal, where a spring trickles from the cliff. There's a sandy beach too, perfect for swimming."

"Sounds marvelous. How far?" Cleo definitely showed interest.

"About an hour by plane."

"If you mean that place to the north of here, it's unsafe, especially now! Are you insane? I'll escort Miss DeHarries wherever she wants to go." Alan glared at Siefert.

Cleo in turn glared at him. His self-assurance nettled her. "Don't worry, Vice-Commander," she said too sweetly. "I wouldn't dream of taking you from

your duties, and I'm sure you have so many. I'll be quite safe with Siefert."

Alan felt his face going red from the rebuff. Marlowe came to the rescue.

"With all apologies to your father, I've never heard anyone play so wonderfully as you. Won't you play for us now? We don't hear enough music up here. We're always so busy."

Cleo couldn't refuse such a gracious request. She went over to the piano and allowed her fingers to sweep tentatively across the keys, then suddenly the room was flooded with Chopin's pensive *E Minor Nocturne*.

She was a creature of strange moods this night. With hardly a pause she swept into Albeniz, and the night was suddenly peopled with the phantoms of the *Fête-Dieu*. The very stone walls seemed to vibrate to the belling processional that rose to a deafening crescendo. And a curious thing happened. Abandoning their temple ululation, the throngs across the way had joined her music in a wordless chant that followed her sweeping chords until her hands were still.

Alan rose. His watch had told him it was late, and he still had to go down into the town for a talk with Joe Patrik, the owner of the Martian Belle. He hoped he could have a moment alone with Cleo, but the moment never came. Marlowe and Siefert rose too. The latter lingered to the last second.

Alan was out under the stars at last and alone, hurrying down the cliff stairs to the little beckoning lights of the town. He reached the plain and skirted the town and strolled toward the canal a short distance away, as he often did when he had things to think through.

The water was heavy, like rippling lead. Low on the opposite side Phobos was a ball of yellow silk tangled in the taajos trees. Alan felt as lonely as a wind must feel wandering across the desolate sweeps of a lifeless planet. A pair of Gee-birds swept low and said, "Gee!" at him very mournfully. Alan felt almost like replying. His brain was awry with bitter thoughts.

THE Martian Belle was the town's only casino. It had one virtue—it was run honestly by Joe Patrik, who was proud of that fact. Akkamin, however—the Glorian high priest—was proud of neither Joe Patrik nor the Martian Belle. Too many of his people were adopting the ways of the Earthmen.

But Akkamin said nothing and never tried to interfere, perhaps because he knew the coördinators were tolerant of the situation and he could not be less.

As Alan entered the casino, Patrik spotted him and came hurrying up. He drew Alan into the semi-darkness of the concave bak-glass doorway. There was surprise in his voice.

"We sure didn't expect you down here tonight!"

"No? Why not?" Alan was puzzled.

Patrik glanced at the little burned place at Alan's side.

"Oh, so that news has gotten around already. Damn little happens without your knowing it, Joe."

The proprietor's thin, aquiline face broke into a brief grin. When Alan moved toward his favorite table on the far side of the room Patrik walked with him.

Bending over as if to adjust the table cloth, the latter whispered, "Yes, I know most of what goes on. Be careful tonight, Lanier!" Then he was gone, melting into the throng of Earth miners and Glorians who crowded the luxurious casino.

Alan glanced about, nodding to several of the Earthmen he recognized. They apparently had not yet heard of his encounter with Khosan, or they would have been at his table questioning him.

Rows of gaming tables were well occupied at the rear of the room. A vile counterpart of Earth brandy, brewed from the sap of the taajos trees, flowed at a revolving bar that was a replica of the solar system, gleaming with Martian semi-precious stones. The floor of dark blue lapis, so common on Mars, was gold-flecked and polished like a mirror.

On earth the Martian Belle would have been famous for its luxury; on Mars it was commonplace.

Alan saw Joe Patrik near the door, watching him anxiously. His mind snapped back to alertness. He knew that a warning from Patrik couldn't go unheeded. He sipped at his drink and looked across the room at the Glorian men crowding around the bar. There were a few new faces, he thought, but couldn't be sure. Glorians were all alike—tall, straight-limbed and muscular, their golden faces usually very passive.

Alan knew that Khosan wouldn't have the foolhardiness to come here, but he might send friends. There were other Glorians who hated the Earthmen as Khosan hated them. Khosan would be vengeful.

Alan touched his hip lightly, then remembered he had left his electro-pistol at home.

He sat back at ease, facing the floor. Things seemed about as usual. He watched the slowly whirling couples dancing silently, lithe golden Glorian girls in the arms of Earthmen. He smiled a little and thought of Thurla, then immediately wished he hadn't. So intensely did Alan try to banish the thought that he almost ignored the subtle sense of danger that pounded a warning note along taut nerves. . . .

But not quite.

With a sudden suppleness he leaned far to the left in his chair. At the same time a Glorian lurched against the table and there was a pencil-thin beam of an electro-gun from his hip. Alan felt the swirling beam of it go dancing past his ear, and glimpsed the blue sputter of sparks on the wall behind him.

THE man didn't get a second try. Alan shoved the edge of the table against the Glorian's wrist with bone-shattering force, pinning it to his side. Before the latter could step back Alan was leaping around the table. He clamped steel fingers on the gun wrist and twisted it toward him, at the same time crouching. The Glorian, despite all his weight, went across Alan's body with ridiculous ease and then landed on the floor.

The man's violet eyes were now lurid with pain and hate but he made no attempt to rise. The floor had miraculously cleared, a mixed circle watching the scene with interest. Personal grudges were not uncommon here.

Alan bent to retrieve the Glorian's weapon which had clattered to the floor.

Before he could straighten he heard someone cry, "Lanier!"

It was Patrik's voice and it held a danger signal. Alan whirled in time to glimpse an Earthman aiming another electro at him. He went prone just as the flash came, then his own hand came up seemingly without volition and he pressed the trigger of the electro-pistol. The thin blue beam caught the Earthman squarely in the chest. There was only a little gurgling sound as he crumpled to the floor.

There was horror in Alan's eyes. The most serious of all crimes was for an Earthman to attack another Earthman here on Mars! Their lives were too pre-

cious, and all of the Earthmen knew it.

"Back, everybody. I said, back! It's all over now."

It was Joe Patrik, bellowing in Martian and English, with a string of lurid curses that would have enthralled a spacer rat. He made a path through the tumult, commanding that mob of super-emotional Glorians and excited Earthmen as if his life were charmed.

"Just a private fight!" he roared, although he knew better. "Drinks on the house, everybody!"

There was a general exodus toward the bar. The injured Glorian had made his escape in the general excitement. Patrik ordered the corpse of the Earthman removed to his private rooms, and beckoned Alan to follow him.

Through a maze of galleries and halls they went, until far behind the Martian Belle Alan found himself in the private quarters.

"Recognize the man?" Patrik asked him.

"Yes. One of Ulmer's pets, a born trouble-maker."

"But the Glorian who tried to get you was one of Khosan's men, I'm certain. That's what I was warning you about. I didn't expect this." Patrik waved to the dead Earthman on the divan.

In a few words Alan told of his disagreement with Ulmer. "When this pet of Ulmer's saw the battle, he thought it was a good time to pitch in, during the excitement. Better get it out of here, Joe—then I want a private talk with you."

PATRIK sent for two of his assistants, who carried the dead Earthman away through a secret exit. Joe shut the door carefully, locking it with an intricate mechanism to which he alone knew the combination.

"Now, spill it. What'd you want to see me about, Lanier?"

"About Khosan. Would you say he's really joined the Rhecs, or is that just a rumor?"

"Rumor thus far. Can't see it myself, but I may be wrong. Anyhow Khosan's not our immediate problem."

"Who is?" Alan shot out.

Patrik stopped in the process of lighting a cigarette. "Ulmer, as you very well know."

Alan grinned. "I guess you're away ahead of me, Joe. Sure, sure—I'm beginning to think Ulmer'd welcome a Rhec

attack that'd destroy the mines. It would be a thorough way of hiding his ore shortage and getting in the clear. As second in command, I'm soon going to take things into my own hands."

"All right," Patrik said matter of factly. "And look—don't let the Rhecs worry you too much." He walked over to a pair of heavy metal doors intricately covered with Martian characters. Joe pressed hidden buttons and a noiseless mechanism swung the ponderous doors open.

Beyond was a large vault stacked with electro-rifles and pistols, piles of tiny but deadly heat-beam tubes—a complete Glorian arsenal of the period of the Martian wars. There were even a few of the Earth atomo pistols, and cases of paratuotrol could be seen.

Alan whistled. "Joe," he said, "how you ever found them is a miracle! I thought those Glorian weapons were supposed to be extinct!"

"Remember last summer when I went over to V'Narol for supplies? My plane lost the beam and I landed away over by the Kaarji foothills. Found this cache there, or most of it. Had it brought in secretly, a little at a time. Been busy ever since, repairing and making over these weapons. Lanier, all I have is right here at the casino, and I don't mean to be caught napping."

"But what good is it to you, Joe? What you have here would be worth millions on Earth, I'll admit—but we've dedicated our lives to Mars."

"But some day," Joe said fiercely, "we can return! It's not far off either. Earth's mines are destroyed, the cities are in shambles. The three powers are nothing more nor less than three great war machines—and only we, the American Hemispheric Coalition, have presential! It won't be long before our new strato-fighters blast those yellow devils and their Teuton allies off the face of the Earth. Then we can return!"

"Bravo!" Alan grinned at the vehement speech. "Meanwhile I have a feeling that the Teutons have managed to build a spacer. There's no other explanation of Ulmer's ore thefts. He's cached a supply of presential somewhere, and if it ever gets into Teuton hands, kiss your chances of ever returning good-by!"

"Exactly. It gives me that much more to fight for." Patrick closed the heavy doors on the arsenal. "Anyway we'll give those Rhecs a taste they'll never forget."

"By tomorrow we should know more

what to expect," Alan said. "Two days ago I sent a couple of the men over by the Kaarji range—that's where the Rhecs will be massing, if anywhere. I'd better be getting home, Joe. Tomorrow'll be a big day."

CHAPTER FOUR

ARSENAL OF THE DOOMED

PATRICK accompanied him back out to the casino. Crossing the still crowded room, Alan stopped abruptly and frowned. At a table near the door he had caught sight of Thurla, quite alone, with a drink before her which she had hardly touched.

Her face was a conflict of emotion. Apparently the ceremonial at the temple this night had been something special indeed—but there was more.

She watched Alan approaching across the room. A light of relief came into her eyes when she saw that he was all right. Alan knew why she had come here this night. She had known that Khosan would not forget. Alan was furious with her for coming. She certainly wasn't helping matters—in fact she was adding fuel to Khosan's kindled hatred.

Alan hardly paused at her table. The relief in her eyes gave way to a sudden hurt look; her lips tightened as though to prevent the beginning of a tremble. Joe Patrik noticed it.

He called, "Wait a minute, Lanier. I think Thurla's ready to leave. Perhaps you'd better escort her—just in case Khosan should still be around."

Thurla said almost in a whisper, "Thank you, Joe. Yes, I am ready to leave." She accompanied Alan outside, keeping pace with his long stride.

There was a stolid silence between them all the way to the stairs, not broken until they reached the wide ledge where Ulmer's house reposed.

Peering back into the huge alcove, Alan remarked, "I see the place is dark. Wonder if Ulmer's retired?"

Deimos, now beginning its slow climb across the sky, seemed to ride on liquid sapphire.

"It's lovely tonight," Thurla sighed. "Everything seems different and more beautiful."

Alan hadn't heard, as they rested there. He was listening to the smooth threnody of the atomic disintegrators surging up through the mine shafts. It

was familiar, soothing music to his ears.

They continued along the ledge to where the rest of the stairs led up.

"Everything," Thurla repeated to herself in a whisper. "Even the ceremony tonight was more beautiful—and different."

Alan was startled, and lifted out of his own moody thoughts at last. It wasn't often that the Glorians so much as mentioned their strange ceremony, Thurla least of all—not even to Alan.

It was a strange puzzle to the Earthmen, who were constantly on the alert to learn more about it. Alan looked sharply at Thurla. She was in a strange reverie of her own this night.

"There were three coordinators there tonight—three! Never so long as I can remember, nor my father before me, has that happened! Nor have I ever seen the Angular Stone so beautiful—shimmering with colors we have never known. Indescribable. And the power of it reaching out, but so soothing! And the message to the coordinators in the little color-patterns, that *we* could but barely understand—a fleeting hint. There will be death and sacrifice and rivers of blood from two worlds. . . ."

Thurla trembled violently and shook her head, then looked about puzzledly as if awakening from a dream.

THE Angular Stone! How many times had Alan heard vague hints of it and vaguer speculation. He had his own theories about it, but they were only theories at best. It might be, he thought, a vastly potential radioactive rock, with color emanations through the incredible speed of its electronic vibrations. Or perhaps the Angular Stone served somehow as a physical contact for that all-powerful, four-dimensional mind known as the Presence. It might even serve as an entrance and egress for the color-shapes, which were but manifestations of the Presence on this plane.

Alan ceased thinking about it as they reached the top of the cliff, because something occurred to awaken his mind with the suddenness of a whiplash. A little ahead of them and to the left was the doctor's house. Beyond it the temple shimmered in the moon glow, its dome seeming to float in a sea of incomparable clarity. And coming toward them from the house was Dr. DeHarries. He was unduly agitated, Alan could tell, even

from that distance. He hurried forward to meet him.

"Thank God you're all right, Alan!" DeHarries exclaimed. He looked haggard and tired.

"So you, too, thought Khosan would be out for revenge. Well, nothing much—"

"No, no! Not that. I just had a delegation from the temple, not more than half an hour ago. It concerns you! Akkamin, the high priest, and his attendants came to the house. You should have seen him. If you think you've seen jewels, think again. That priest was a living blaze from head to feet, not an inch of his golden skin visible below the neck, and on his head he had a diadem of white *acerins!* But that isn't a tenth of it. Right over his heart—over his heart, mind you, imbedded in the flesh—was a magnificent blue stone of a color I've never seen, a sort of pulsating, living electric blue. Judging from the circumference, its depth must have been such as to practically touch the heart itself! I'm a doctor, and I tell you the man should have been dead with that jewel in him. But there he was, and behind him eleven acolytes, in imitation of *the* Eleven, I suppose, trailing jewels and plumes." He stopped for breath.

"But what did he want? It must be a matter of life and death, for Akkamin to even acknowledge our existence."

"It is. Prepare yourself, Alan—they know all about the Rhecs. What's more, they've found out that someone has supplied the black tribes with disintegrators!"

"Holy heaven!" Alan went white as Deimos. "How many?"

"The Rhecarians have from fifteen to twenty individual disintegrators, enough to cause tremendous havoc. And. . . ."

The doctor paused, his face ashen.

"Yes, go on." A cold dread rose up Alan's spine.

"The coordinators want *you*," DeHarries blurted. "Tomorrow you are to enter the temple for their initiation ordeal. It's not only that they want to find out who gave the Rhecs the disintegrators—it's much more. Akkamin wouldn't say; I don't think he even knew."

"Sacred Kaladonis, *now* what hellish business have they in mind!" Despite himself Alan still felt the coldness at his spine.

"I don't know," DeHarries' voice broke. "I offered myself in your place, Alan. I'm an old man and I know things about the

mind that most Earthmen don't suspect. But Akkamin brushed me aside as if I weren't there. He delivered his message and withdrew to his temple."

ALAN spread his hands. "I'll just have to do it, I guess. We're all in on this now. At least—" he tried to lighten the tension with an attempt at gaiety—"I'll be the first Earthman to see the Angular Stone."

"If they hurt you, Alan, I'll turn the B-11 on their temple! I swear it!"

"Don't let it worry you. Just the same," Alan added thoughtfully, "maybe I'd better be prepared. What about that neuro-thalamic theory of yours? It presupposes a single conscious mind acting through a brain organ utilized only in part—is that correct?"

"Haven't you read my monograph on *New Principles of Neuro-Thalamics*?" DeHarries bristled. "I thought everyone had, the better to crucify me!"

"No, Doc. That monograph of yours, after all, was over eighteen hundred pages. But I've read parts of it. What I want to know about is your denial of the subconscious mind and your experiments on vibratory rates, and—you know what I'm striving for!"

"I'll tell you briefly," DeHarries answered. "The fallacy in assuming that there is a conscious and subconscious mind arose from the fact that the actual seat of memory has never been localized. It was assumed that they were stored in an immense reservoir, a submerged part of the brain *submerged* and therefore *subconscious*, during the life of the individual. To be drawn from, in an imperfect manner, by the consciousness."

"What is sleep, then?" Alan demanded suddenly.

"Serious thought would show you," De-

Harries retorted, "that sleep is not cessation of action, but a different kind of action from that of the awakened state. I have proved," he emphasized, "that the brain has a system of electromagnetic tuning, intensified at the highest part of the brain, where the most difficult thinking is carried out, keeping that part of the brain throbbing at ten pulsations per second in the normal individual. Now, if we increase the *tonus*—that is, the throb rate—we increase awareness—in a word, thought power! I wouldn't be surprised if the brain of one of the coördinators would be throbbing at many times that rate. If I could only operate on one of—"

He broke off short as he looked at Thurla, hitherto silent, who had given a horrified gasp.

"Anyway," DeHarries stated flatly, "the ancient mystics increased that throb rate at intervals through their many breathing exercises and inward meditation. The result is what they called *Samahdi*, or state of bliss. There are great areas in the brain that have not been brought into controlled use, but will as the race develops. However these areas can be stimulated into daily activity artificially. E.S.P., which science has at last been forced to accept, is merely the result of some of these areas becoming active in certain subjects."

"Thank you, Doc. What you've said helps a lot." In Alan's mind the ceremonial ordeal of the temple and the coördinators was becoming clearer.

"Won't you gentlemen come in? The night air's a little chilly, isn't it?" It was Mrs. DeHarries' voice from the doorway. Both the doctor and Alan realized they had stopped to carry on their discussion. They crossed the porch to the open door. Suddenly Cleo was framed there.

"Oh, good evening! Won't you please



"THAT'S FOR ME FOR ENERGY"



come in too?" Cleo was looking beyond them.

Alan turned and saw Thurla, who, almost forgotten, had stepped out of the delicate shadows by the porch.

THURLA accepted the invitation to the extent of stepping hesitantly inside. She gazed at the girl from Earth with undisguised curiosity. Thurla was motionless, golden as the cape of Kra that fell about her shoulders, with wide violet eyes framed in the cascade of her dark hair.

No less intent was the gaze of the doctor's daughter, whose skin by contrast was like alabaster, her brown eyes cool and remote, her auburn curls gold-flecked and shimmering. Mrs. DeHarries was gazing too, beneath eyebrows arched in a question. Then she looked at her husband. The latter was forced to make the introductions.

"Thurla, priestess of the Temple. My wife, and my daughter Cleo."

"Cleo." Thurla repeated the English word with her own peculiar sibilant, and smiled.

"Thurla was down at the town visiting friends, and we—that is, Alan was escorting her home. They're sort of neighbors, my dear."

"Do you mean that you live up here alone?" Mrs. DeHarries asked. "Near the mines?"

"Yes," Thurla replied calmly. "In the pavilion across the road from Alan's home. I don't like it in the town."

"We'll have to be going," Alan said. "It's very late." At the door he turned and added, "I'll want to see you tomorrow, Doctor." And as he went out his mouth was pressed into a tight line, because at the last glimpse he had of Cleo she was facing him with that Mona Lisa smile still on her lips.

He and Thurla walked in silence side by side past the temple, and met the little road leading gradually down to the lower slope. There was much on Alan's mind now, important and disturbing things piling up. But not quite screened by the swarm of other thoughts, the knowledge than next day he was to enter the temple loomed above everything else.

If anything happened to him, DeHarries and Marlowe would have to take over, with Joe Patrik's help. There was no doubt in his mind now that Ulmer was disloyal. If it were his last act, Alan meant to neutralize him.

He glanced at Thurla walking patiently beside him, and wondered what she was thinking. They arrived at Thurla's pavilion. Alan stopped there a moment with her.

He looked up at the unnatural bright nearness of Deimos, listened to the faint mixture of night sounds coming up from the Canal. He breathed deeply of the mysterious odor of Mars in which was mingled the tangy perfume of Thurla's hair which almost brushed his shoulder.

"I wonder why they want me at the Temple tomorrow," Alan murmured. "Why me, instead of a Glorian? I, too, am emotionally unstable." Alan leaned forward and kissed her lightly upon the cheek, and wondered why she stood there so unmoving.

Thurla's voice was low, her lips not even curving in the slightest smile, as she said, "Cleo's very pretty, Alan, don't you think? But she smiles too much. . . ."

ABROODING silence greeted the dawn. No raucous cries, no rustling leaves, not even the desolate wind. To the horizon's endless scarlet rim Mars was still.

Alan awoke. Within his mind he felt again that insistent vibration impinging on his brain, something like an alien will prodding his own.

He dressed with haste, not knowing why; his mind was preternaturally clear, yet he tried in vain to formulate the insistent message that strove to become lucid in his mind.

Forsaking breakfast, he strode to the door. As he stepped outside, he was enveloped in a swirl of living light. A great sphere of glowing colors, constantly vibrating, closely absorbed him and rose toward the Martian skies.

Greetings! The thought flashed to him sharp as the spear of the Angel Gabriel.

Alan could not see in the midst of the interplay of light, but he was vividly aware of the entity near him.

Who are you? Alan thought, and instantly the reply came as if it arose in his own brain.

I am Luzbel, one of the Eleven.

You're one of the coordinators. I've seen several of you at times over the desert. Once—one of you came to me.

Several? I am the only one constantly in contact with the younger people.

But I've seen several of these light spheres at the same time, Alan insisted.

Shells. The coordinator was laconic

now. *Projectional synthesis. I visited you.*

Oh! Alan was silent, then curious. *What do you mean, "younger people"? The Glorians?*

Yes. You Earthmen also, although there's much about your race we have not been able to coördinate. Your mental rate is so different from ours.

We seem to understand the Glorians, and they understand us. Alan was nettled.

Emotionally, yes. Alan had a sense of pure intellectual amusement, if there were such a thing. Although you have a greater emotional tenacity than the younger people.

You, I suppose, are the Older People, Alan smiled.

We have no emotions. The thought came cold and stark.

Then why have you visited me? Why do you have so great an interest in me? Intellectually I have little to offer. And now I understand you are to probe my mind to find out who gave those damned disintegrators to the Rhecarians.

Again the emotional speaks, came the thought, and the sense of detached amusement was with Alan. We intend no such thing. You've heard what Akkamin said, but even he does not know. We are aware who gave the tribes the disintegrators. What we seek above all is rapport with your mind, that we may coördinate all the knowledge you have brought from Earth—that we may study all that you Earthmen are, and aspire to. We will not violate your will. Nor shall we force from you that which you would not give. But in return for what we ask, so in like measure will we give you of our knowledge and to a certain extent our power. However, even in this crisis that is upon you it would be beyond our purpose to add weapons and means to the emotionally unstable. We do not interfere—ever.

"I agree," Alan said aloud, thoughtfully. "Take from my mind that which you need. Now tell me, where are we?"

Look beneath you!

The swirling mists of light at Alan's feet became transparent, and he saw that he was above the great dome of the temple. As far as his eyes could see, an immense multitude crowded every inch of space, overflowing to the very portals. Then the globe that enclosed him was within the building, descending through an opening in the dome itself.

Alan was standing on the floor of

mosaic stones, vividly aware that he was the first Earthman ever to attain such an honor. The sphere of light was gone and before him was Luzbel, radiant.

Alan had no eyes for the intricate patterns of blazing gems that seemed in constant motion on the far walls. His gaze was caught and riveted to the altar at the further end, lofty and dazzling with unbearable emanations from a gigantic angular stone, in the shape of a prone letter "L"!

CHAPTER FIVE

BEYOND THE LIGHT

"THE Angular Stone!"

It was Alan's voice in a bare whisper. To his gaze it defied analysis. What could it be? A tremendously radio-active substance that produced visible whorls of force? Or perhaps a fulcrum of some incredible electronic pattern beyond anything mortal minds could encompass?

Neither! Luzbel's thought came startlingly clear. *You shall see very soon now.*

The coördinator extended his arm in a gesture whose significance was beyond Alan. Quite by chance the wide sleeve of his shimmering tunic brushed Alan, sending streams of force through him, almost galvanized him.

Luzbel began the walk to the altar, and Alan knew that he was to follow. From the coördinator's mind he sensed something farcical about it—that same hint of detached amusement. Alan came a pace behind him, his mind now watchful.

Then he saw Akkamin and Thurla. They, with the eleven acolytes, were prostrate upon the steps of the altar, enveloped in the gorgeous ceremonial robes. Alan smiled down upon Thurla as he drew near, although she could not see him. A startling thought from Luzbel commanded him, and before Alan could dwell upon it they were ascending the steps to the Stone itself.

Before the gigantic, dazzling matrix Luzbel didn't stop. As if the interplay of forces did not exist, he majestically entered the core of light—seemed to press into the Stone itself!

Alan followed, his eyes closed against the unbearable radiance.

For a moment he felt as if tiny hot talons were tearing at the recesses of his brain; he reeled, almost fell, staggered onward a few steps with hands out-

stretched. And then he was beyond the light and his brain was aglow with a strange new energy. He opened his eyes. . . .

He was in a room so tiny as to contain only himself and Luzbel and a queer sort of couch a pace away. At the couch's head was the most intricate piece of mechanism Alan had ever seen, made entirely of a metal that resembled presential but had a deeper, darker hue, as if it had been alloyed.

The upper part was a maze of tubes, transparent, yet giving the impression of unbreakable solidity.

Alan could not long examine it. Luzbel's thoughts leaped out to touch his mind.

As you see, it is not stone at all. What you saw out there was merely the constant mental streams of force which we, the Eleven, direct upon that spot—forming the illusion of a stone radiating light emanations. It serves a two-fold purpose. It fulfills a certain emotional—I think they call it religious—need of the younger people, and it conceals what really lies within.

So the Angular Stone I've theorized about so much is really only this machine.

Yes. This machine—the only one on Mars, perhaps on any planet. It contains all the knowledge of all time on our planet. It is a record of the race. More than that, it is almost the record that will be. Needless to say, were it to fall into the hands of the younger people it might mean disaster. We communicate with them on occasion, and receive what we seek to know; Akkamin receives our thoughts with some facility. His mind is in rapport in the lower coördinates.

But what would happen, Alan asked, if anyone tried to take the machine?

LUZBEL shrugged mentally. *They could not penetrate the barrier of mental force. Should we care to, we could annihilate whoever tried it. But we neither punish nor kill, as that would be emotional.*

But good Lord, man! Alan was becoming exasperated; especially he remembered Luzbel's unguarded thought on the steps of the altar, when he had smiled down on Thurla. I can understand your being too advanced to feel mere anger, or jealousy or hate, or even dreaming of killing anyone—but have you never wanted to love?

Luzbel didn't answer, and Alan felt a

cold mental barrier rise between them.

We will begin now.

Luzbel touched several of the finger-like keys that surrounded the upper part of the machine in a circular row. The tubes filled with a ghastly blue radiance that swirled and eddied in turmoil.

Since you came to Mars I have tried several times to gain complete rapport with your mind. It is difficult. If you will recline, please, and put on the helmet. . . .

Alan lay at full length on the couch, with the curious mesh helmet enfolding his skull. Outside, beyond the altar and the confines of the temple itself, he could hear the sustained Glorian chanting that was so familiar to him by now.

His mind was brought back by Luzbel who stood for the barest moment, hesitant, before the carved indicator dial. Then the coördinator moved the regulator a fourth of the way around.

Thus far will it impart knowledge to your consciousness, once I contact your helmet to the machine. I shall at the same time look into your mind and obtain that which is accessible. Then I shall leave you. When you rise and go the temple will be deserted.

Alan smiled at Luzbel, watching him connect the helmet. A million delicate pin-pricks seemed to pierce his skull and before he could even struggle he was unconscious. He did not see Luzbel standing motionless, absorbing at a terrific rate all that the Earthman's mind could give him—the incredible story of wars and cataclysms, struggle and heroism and triumphs that was the heritage of Earth. Even unto the limits of race heritage, as far as the unplumbed recesses of Alan's consciousness he delved, absorbed in the alien story of another world.

At last Luzbel had obtained enough. This knowledge, of course, he would project to the other coördinators, and through their combined will to the Presence itself. He looked down upon Alan's supine form for a moment, then checked again the connections of the helmet and the machine, whose impulses were even then flowing from the tubes along delicate filaments to Alan's brain.

As he turned to leave, the hem of his tunic caught on the projecting indicator, pushing it far forward to the three-quarter mark. Luzbel might have noticed, were his mind not so absorbed in the story of Earth.

As it was, the increase in frequency, audible in the higher scales, escaped even



Luzbel's sensitive ears completely. . . .

ALAN awakened. How much time had elapsed he would never know. He only knew that he came to consciousness gasping, sobbing, gibbering almost, every muscle of his splendid body racked to the very limits of human endurance. But this was nothing compared to the hellish mental torture he'd undergone.

It took him several minutes to realize what had gone before, and then he knew he had come very close to insanity.

In the space of a few hours a universe of knowledge had been poured into his consciousness, under unimaginable pressure. It came surging through his mind now, causing his head to ache unbearably. Mathematical equations beyond anything known on Earth were his now, not only intellectually but actually a part of his experience. All the science and culture of Mars were intrinsically a part of him.

Alan's gaze found the indicator dial, and his heart leaped. Three-quarters! That must have been an accident, of course; he did not believe that even Luzbel would have deliberately put him through the ordeal wherein he had unconsciously died a thousand deaths. All the profound knowledge of the Eleven, up to where the indicator had been inadvertently pushed, had been poured into his mind, forcing area after dormant area of his brain into instant activity.

Despite his aching brain Alan smiled inwardly. Doctor DeHarries would love this! It was, at least in part, a confirmation of his neuro-thalamic theory.

Then Alan frowned. The possibilities here were infinite, and he must proceed cautiously. No telling what Luzbel would do if he became aware of the error. . . .

Alan tried to rise but a great weakness made his body limp and useless. He remembered the globe of light that Luzbel used to transport himself, and wondered if his powers extended that far.

He tried it, envisioning the globe of color he knew so well and endeavoring to create one mentally around himself. A faint aura appeared, swirled, wavered and was gone.

Alan desisted, because he was frightened and because it taxed his mind too much at present. He rested a while and felt the strength flowing back.

At last he arose and passed through the curtain of light that created the illusion of the Angular Stone.

As Luzbel had predicted, the temple was deserted, but he found DeHarries and Marlowe, as well as Joe Patrik, Mrs. DeHarries and Cleo, waiting outside in a frenzy of foreboding.

"Alan!" It was a multiple cry from several throats. "What'd they do? How do you feel?"

Dr. DeHarries examined him professionally, but Alan calmed them with a cheery smile and a reassuring wave of the hand.

"I'm perfectly all right. They didn't do anything to me," he lied. "Just as I thought, it was a lot of ceremonial hocus-pocus."

"We've been waiting here since six o'clock." Joe Patrik mopped his brow. "We didn't know what to do. Couldn't get a word out of the Glorians about what was going on."

"I tried to enter the temple," Cleo said calmly, "but they wouldn't let me."

"You—tried to enter the temple!" Alan marveled, a profound sense of gratification rising in him.

"Yes, three times. But tell us, what was the ceremony like?" The insatiably curious Mrs. DeHarries was at Alan's elbow, eyes bright with excitement.

"Magnificent, but too long to tell you now. Later, perhaps. You'll have to excuse me. I must be alone for a while." And despite their chorus of protests, Alan left them to wend his solitary way toward his home.

Mars seemed different now. How many of its secrets were his! Alan smiled, pondering the reaction of the other Earthmen were he to project a vibrational sphere, which he was now aware had been revealed to him in the sixth knowledge. Now, too, the *America*, apex of Earth's engineering, seemed a toy as Alan revolved in his mind the formula for a fuel of multiple intensity achieved through progressive atomic disintegration.

"Mathematics of the Infinite," he murmured to himself, in the third knowledge. He was only beginning to realize the potentialities of neuro-synthesis that were his to use at will.

This is one time, he said inwardly, when unwittingly they have interfered. It was then that he became aware of something in his clenched fist. He raised his hand and opened it. On his palm lay the most exquisitely beautiful electric blue stone, about an inch in diameter, that he had ever seen.

About it was a quality of aliveness as

if it had an existence of its very own.

Magnetic, of course, Alan thought, and instantly he was aware that if he were to place it near his heart, it would become imbedded in his flesh, and thereafter he would be in constant communication with at least one of the coordinators. He considered it for a moment, then placed it in his pocket.

APPROACHING the Engineers' House, he saw Thurla emerging from her pavilion across the way. Her hair streamed behind her as she raced down the steps toward him, with a little cry. Then, remembering that now he was sacred, she stood awed and trembling before him.

"Don't be afraid of me, Thurla," Alan said with infinite gentleness as he smiled.

"I—I am not afraid. But how shall I address you now?" she almost wailed in her bewilderment. "You are of the chosen ones, who have entered the light!"

"Address me as Alan, of course. Remember? I haven't changed. My knowledge is greater, but I'm still a man." He laughed to reassure her, and a greater power than awe sent her stumbling into his arms in a flood of tears. It was the first time Alan, or for that matter any Earthman, had ever seen a Glorian weep. She quieted in a moment, and with the mercurial emotions of the Glorians, raised a smiling face. But she asked no questions. Alan wondered how much she knew.

He tried to look into her mind and, to his intense surprise, found it guarded. He would have had to force his way in, violating her will. That, as he had learned, was not his right.

Ask me! Thurla flashed the thought. *What is it you would know?* Instantly Alan was aware that both she and Akkamin had telepathic powers. They would have to, as the link between the coordinators and the Glorian people.

"Not now, Thurla. Later. Right now there's a tremendously important task you must do. The town must be evacuated and every Glorian brought up here. Tell Akkamin to get the temple ready. In the battle that's coming we shall need all available space to accommodate the women and children and injured. There's no other way."

"Akkamin will not consent," Thurla said dully.

"Akkamin will consent when I speak!" Alan called upon every ounce of majesty

in his voice. "As you yourself have said, I am of the chosen. It's a command!"

HE WATCHED Thurla moving upward across the mesa to the Stairway. He was satisfied now that things would get under way down there in the town. He entered the Engineers' House and flung himself on the metal-mesh *Uonja* covered with Kra.

In silence, he received the Martian record. If anything it had been even bloodier than Earth's. Through the centuries, the Rhec tribes had multiplied both as to members and cunning. Although they had no native science, they knew how to use the ancient Glorian weapons.

Alan made a prodigious effort, mentally seeking their present camp. He caught a blurred impression of it—far to the north in the Kaarji foothills, as he had thought. There were thousands of them, and among them *Glorian leaders!*

"The devils!" his lips formed the words as the mental picture faded and his brain began to ache. "The banished ones who do not exist. They have nothing to lose and a world to gain!" He lay back in silence, integrating his mental forces to form the pattern of defensive plans. Now he knew that the presential mines were the objective of these outlawed Glorian leaders.

The safety of two worlds depended on the mines. Presential was the throne of mastery, and in either Teuton or Rhecian hands it spelled slavery for the rest.

For a long time Alan lay utterly still, as if submerged in a cataleptic state. When he rose, he felt that he was now ready to project his first prismatic sphere. He tried. It expanded around him, engulfed him, swirling with an inward energy. It seemed to rise of its own volition. All Alan had to do was guide it.

However, he didn't want to reveal his powers as yet. He walked across the mesa to DeHarries' home, and entered the office, where he found the doctor working on the B-11 machine.

"Well, Alan!" DeHarries was a little surprised. "Didn't expect you so soon, after the way you left us." Then he smiled. "Enter, Magnificence!"

"I come," Alan said quietly, "because we have very little time to lose. Right now the Rhecs are massing by the thousands, and others from far across the desert are marching to join them. A group

of exiled Glorians, probably headed by Khosan, have taught them the use of Glorian weapons and armed them from centuries-old caches in the desert. We'll be outnumbered ten or twenty to one." Briefly he gave DeHarries a picture of what he'd seen and told him the outline of his plan.

"But how did you get all this information?" the doctor marvelled, looking at Alan as if he were aware of a strange difference in him.

"I'll explain later. Right now I must see Joe Patrik. Remember, prepare to accommodate thousands—in your home, the Temple, the abandoned priest houses—anywhere! The whole town must be brought up here. Get Marlowe and have him round up every Earth miner and send them down to Joe Patrik's without delay. You come too, if you can. We'll hold our council of war there."

Before DeHarries could question him further, Alan was gone. He ran to the great Stairway and descended several steps until he was hidden from view, then projected a mental sphere. He propelled himself and it swiftly downward, alighting well out of sight behind the Martian Belle.

He found Joe Patrik in his subterranean quarters, literally surrounded by piles of weapons on which he was working.

"I see you have anticipated me," Alan said, "or else news travels mighty fast. Yes, I expect the advance guard to attack soon, perhaps even tonight. They'll want to see what we have in the way of weapons."

They discussed the plans of defense, deciding to halt the attack on the edge of town where it would come from the desert, then across the bank of the canal. Their last stand if necessary would be the cliff.

Ulmer's presential temple, too, would be a bulwark. This was the building Ulmer had erected in the town, asking Akkamin to abandon the temple on the mesa when it became unsafe because of the tunnels beneath. Akkamin, of course, had ignored the clumsy offering, and "Ulmer's Folly", as Alan secretly dubbed it, had stood empty ever since, a single forlorn spire.

It was high noon when Joe had all the details in his mind. Thurla, too, had been busy.

Already now, as Alan was leaving he could hear the excitement and bustle in the town as the evacuation began.

HE WALKED along the streets that now, by contrast, were scenes of utter confusion. But it was a confusion that would adjust itself, Alan noted with satisfaction as he saw the Glorian line of exodus slowly forming to the Stairway. True, they were all trying to save every iota of their personal belongings, but that was a situation to be dealt with later. Just now Alan inspected the town with an eye to its defense.

Towering above the other structures, whose purples and greens and Martian reds were like an aureole in the last rays of the sun, Ulmer's presential temple rose like a foreboding forefinger from the plaza he'd built around it.

Ideal for snipers, Alan thought inwardly. From behind those flowers and taa-jos-fringed promenades, too, the attackers could be given a hot welcome. He turned to the right, where the single arched span led across the canal to the jungle clearing beyond. They would have to direct half their attention there. Everywhere he encountered the hurried activity of Glorians who never did anything by halves, once they were aroused. Groups of Glorian men, heat beams at their belts and Kra cloaks carelessly flung over their allurium suits, passed him, saluting Alan with their curious gesture of placing the right hand on the left shoulder.

All of them knew by now that he had been initiated at the Temple ceremony. They connected this in some remote manner with the coming conflict, and they were almost exultant at the prospect.

If it only lasts long enough, Alan thought.

With a part of his mind he was already assigning tasks to the various Earthmen according to their capacities. Arms and ammunition to be stacked in easily accessible places. Food stocks to be transported to a central commissary near the temple, and guarded. Long-deserted priest buildings, semi-ruined and now inhabited by furtive Kaladonis and raucous Gee-birds, to be cleaned and made habitable. This might be more than a battle. It could be siege.

Swiftly the pattern grew in his mind, to be given to his lieutenants, DeHarries, Patrik and Marlowe, Lohss, the heliographer, and Arnold, the chief foreman.

Suddenly, then, the thought that had been stabbing subtly at a part of his mind exploded like the sudden crack of a whip-lash.

What had happened to Ulmer?

CHAPTER SIX

FLIGHT TO—DANGER!

ULMER was gone. Alan knew that when, in one mighty integrational effort of all his mental forces, he turned a neuro-synthetic projection toward Ulmer's house on the ledge. But he could not maintain the connection long, and he had to see for himself, in person. Perhaps Ulmer had left a clue.

Making his way past the Glorians who already crowded the great Stairway, Alan reached the ledge and turned inward toward the house. A search of the rooms failed to reveal a clue. Indeed, there was every indication that Ulmer had been planning this for days. Alan wondered how many men he had taken with him. Siefert, surely, and perhaps others.

Again Alan searched for Ulmer with the preternatural power of his mind, but it was as if many minds in concerted effort were putting up a mental guard.

Glorians! Alan was startled. Only they knew how to guard their minds. Alan shrugged at last and decided that Ulmer could not have left the planet. There were no spacers here. And on Mars he could never go where Alan's mind couldn't find him later.

Leaving Ulmer's quarters by the rear tunnel, he came to the inner door of the presential mine. He entered the airlock corridor and fortunately found an oxygen helmet remaining there. This was necessary before he could enter the mine proper, because they mined in an atmosphere which, if not a complete vacuum, was as nearly so as human ingenuity could make it. They had long since found that Presential was more susceptible to the action of the disintegrators in inverse ratio to the amount of atmosphere permitted.

Adjusting the oxygen flow of the helmet, Alan followed the tunnel that led in a gentle gradient for a hundred feet, until he came to the vast grotto. Here he paused, as he never failed to do, staring reverently. This was not the work of Earthmen.

The maze of machinery that took up a great part of the grotto, from floor to roof, had been devised and worked by the ancient Glorians at a supreme moment in their history. Alan wished he could have known them, that ancient race. In the center two gigantic spheres, fully seventy feet in diameter and side by side,

were supported on perpendicular pivots. From the lower side of each sphere, cables two feet in diameter led down through the cavern floor to the very bowels of Mars.

ALAN proceeded along the catwalk, past the singing spheres that glinted iridescently. The various tunnels were empty and silent now. Undoubtedly all the workmen were down at Joe Patrik's listening to the war strategy. Alan entered the furthest tunnel, the one that led directly under the Glorian temple. He examined the presential pillars that had been left standing, until finally he came to the point where he, as first engineer, had given orders to cease boring the rich vein, lest the temple collapse.

Now he saw that Ulmer had gone ahead. The tunnel made a slight angle to the left. Alan followed it, noting by the brown glaze of the walls the thoroughness with which the ore had been extracted. The supporting pillars, too, had been worked criminally thin. He came upon one which had utterly collapsed.

But he'd seen what he wanted.

A six per cent drop in production, according to Ulmer, he thought. More like ten per cent, actually, plus whatever he mined surreptitiously. He might have been able to get out a lot at that, if his few men worked like fiends.

He wondered where they'd taken it.

Now he must see Lohss. He hurried back to the main tunnel and thence up to the mine entrance leading onto the mesa. A crystal dome curved over the entrance, housing their single telescope. Alan ascended the spiral stairs to the tiny observatory and found Lohss, the heliographer, hunched over his calculations.

Lohss was their only link with Earth except for the freighter that arrived twice a year. Under ideal conditions—and they were rare—they were able to pick up the message flashed from Earth by a series of concentric mirrors of immense circumference, set high in the Rocky Mountains.

"Hello, Alan!" the heliographer welcomed him.

"Hello, Lohss. Got anything new?"

"Just a little. Picked it up a few hours before dawn. Fragmentary, but clear enough. I'm afraid it's not very good news." He handed Alan a coded sheet, which the latter deciphered rapidly.

"So," Alan said, "they've done it at last. The Teutons finally concentrated enough of their stratoplanes to be able to stop

our freighter! Well, I expected it. They've been trying long enough."

"But this is the important part!" Lohss pointed to the latter half of the message, fragmentary, in which the words *war spacer* stood out stark and clear.

Alan studied it.

"Sure," he said matter-of-factly. "With the presential ore that was aboard, they would naturally turn that freighter into a war spacer. It might have happened months ago. There's no date here. Anyway, they're probably on their way here, or soon will be. They'll find Ulmer's ore waiting for them, and then we'll find that the struggle for Earth has been carried to two worlds. . . ."

He looked up into Lohss's anxious eyes.

"This information's not to be divulged, Lohss," he said.

"Y-yes, sir," Lohss said.

"You are to eat, sleep and live here. I have a feeling that this message was originally sent weeks ago and this is a repetition. Don't move from that telescope. We must get every scrap of information we can, understand?"

He didn't wait for the heliographer's acknowledgment, but whirled with the speed of his accelerated molecular rate, that left Lohss blinking in astonishment.

EVENING fell and night came and still the expected attack did not materialize. Alan was glad of the respite. Cleo smiled wanly at him when he returned to the DeHarries home to see how the doctor was progressing with the B-11. The Earth girl was showing her true mettle now, as she worked side by side with Thurla in seeing to the comfort of the Glorian arrivals.

DeHarries' home, the temple, even the ruins of the abandoned priest houses scattered in disarray over the mesa, had become beehives as a town was born overnight. The arrivals who still came in steady stream after nightfall wanted to know what they could do to help and performed their allotted tasks to the letter.

DeHarries had made progress with the B-11 ray but was still far from his goal. To be effective, the weapon of which they dreamed would have to be raised to one hundred times its present magnitude, and sent along a directional beam powered by atomic concentration.

Alan left him there laboring over his equations, and hurried down to the town where most of the Earthmen and Glori-

ans were concentrated. The conical Martian houses which had always seemed so strange to Alan were stranger still in the silence of the deserted streets. Only the Martian Belle was a blaze of lights.

Joe Patrik had carried out the plan well. Electro-riflemen lurked along the canal, and the keenest-eyed ones—Glorians mostly—were stationed in the spire of the temple that reached upward into darkness. The weapons from Patrik's vault had been apportioned to his own picked force of Earthmen and Glorians, who formed the first line of defense, awaiting the onslaught.

Alan made only one change. "Where is your para-tuotrol?" he asked Patrik.

The latter led him to Ulmer's temple where the explosive had been placed for ready use.

"Move it," Alan commanded. "Keep it in the vault, except one or two boxes that we might need out here. One direct hit, and it's all gone. Dim the lights of the Casino. Tell the men to get some sleep, but change the guard at the canal every six hours."

SOMEHOW Alan himself slept. He had never intended to. He awoke with a strange awareness that it was almost dawn. He was in the Casino, and about him some of the other men slept at the tables, heads resting on their arms.

Alan moved to the door, sleep gone from him instantly as a pounding thought persisted at his brain. In the town beyond a vast silence reigned. Under the grim gray skies it lay sprawled and inert, as if in that ultimate exhaustion that contemplates with indifference the immediacy of death.

"Joe!" he shouted, his voice echoing from the cliff that reared behind him.

As if the word had been a signal, the jungle wall across the canal and the desert sands to the right spawned a tidal wave of savage, screaming Rhecarian blacks.

From every hummock and hill, from every taajos-leafed shadow, they came scurrying forward impervious to the hooked thorns and slashing desert grass. But Joe Patrik had not been idle either, in the night. A barrage of electro volleys cut gaps in the advancing black tide. Alan saw him then, and his line of picked men. Between the temple and the canal they had erected long barricades of heavy household furniture.

But the Rhecs had electros too, and

were using them well. The black tide advanced. Green hair flowing in the dawn light, yellow eyes hate-filled and fanatic, they were trying to skirt both ends of the barricade.

Alan judged the space between the Casino and the defenders, and rushed across it. He headed for Patrik, whose voice could be heard thundering directions and hair-raising curses. He had almost reached the line when an electro charge jarred Alan to his feet, and spun him like a top. He staggered forward, fell to one knee but recovered and gained the barricade just as a concentration of electros made a boiling cauldron of the spot where he'd been.

Strong hands pulled him down and forced him to lie flat for a moment. Deft fingers probed where Alan's allurium suit had been burned in the upper right shoulder.

"I'm all right." Alan sat up, and heard Patrik's soft curse of amazement. At Alan's right shoulder, a deepening streak zig-zagged down the allurium suit to the pocket over his chest. Fumbling there, Alan drew out the blue stone. It was unbelievably radiant now. But there was

no wound! The electro charge had been drawn and completely absorbed by the starry jewel. Alan's eyes widened, but there was no time now to speculate into the nature of this magical gem.

His own pistol was out and he fired at random into the advancing tide. From the desert dunes a quick, ascending whine was heard, all too familiar to their ears.

"Disintegrator!" one of the men beside Alan gasped. Seconds later their barricade began to crumble, metal falling apart and wood going up in flames.

High overhead Alan heard a single *ping* and then another. The whine of the disintegrator ceased abruptly. The sharpshooters in the presential tower were at work.

The very silence of the attack made it the more terrible. No yells, no screams of pain as the green-haired Rhecs littered the terrain by the score. Even Joe Patrik had ceased shouting orders now, as the men automatically formed two sections guarding each end of the barricade. An Earthman sank down with a sigh as an electro charge entered and found him. A swarm of Rhecs had surged around to the left, flanking the defenders. The

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snipers in the tower shouted the warning down to them.

The men on that side waited, until the blacks hove into view. They even allowed them to come forward a little, before loosing the concentrated barrage. The huge, yellow-eyed Rhec leader leaped a full five feet from the ground as the cross-fire struck, and he shattered the silence with a shrill, "Ahee . . . ha!"

He still tried to crawl forward as the second volley came. Others fell like tenpins until the sands were a squirming black mass, made vivid by their greenish hair as the sun arose with accustomed suddenness.

It seemed to hang poised on the horizon a moment, staring with awe upon the scene.

"THEY'LL be back again soon!" Joe prophesied, and calmly began to tape sticks of para-tuotrol. "That wasn't an advance attack. They moved all their forces up in the night."

Alan took stock of the damage to their men. Nearly a score were wounded and at least half as many dead, Earthmen and Glorians alike. It was a heavy toll to pay, in the first ten minutes. He ordered the dead carried back to the Casino, and then began treating the wounded men. The heat from the smouldering barricade was unbearable and already the sun was beginning to bite, as if it too were going to enjoy entering this battle.

Without warning the terrain beyond them spewed black bodies once more.

"We can't let them through. We can't!" Alan was repeating over and over, unaware that he was saying it. But Joe heard him, and smiled sardonically as he contemplated the answer in his hands. Like a solid whirlpool the hurtling figures came forward, and now not only electro guns, but deadly jargatans, the long saw-toothed knives of the Rhec, flashed in the sun. Outnumbering the defenders ten to one, they continued to pour in a cataract of death, stumbling over their own dead. Not even the accurate work of the snipers in the tower stemmed them.

The Rhec were within yards of the barricade before Joe acted. Quite calmly he stood up, peering over the colorful bar that had been dragged from the Casino. A flashing jargatan creased his cheek, but unaware of it, Joe described an arc with his arm and a bundle of para-tuotrol. Where the surging Rhec had

been, the desert erupted in geysers of sand and black fragments.

One of the Glorian defenders had stood up to watch. Now he stood there, transfixed by a jargatan, his three hundred years of life expectancy cut by a silver flash. For a second his eyes stared in bewilderment, then all the energy seemed to leave his body as he tottered like the flame of a candle ready to gutter and go out. Slowly he sank to the ground.

Once more Joe's arm swung and a sheet of flame and shattered flesh went skyward. A lake of flame spread over the sand dotted with black bodies.

"Now!" Alan was shouting. "Now!"

Electros, atomo-rifles and heat beams poured a hail into the thoroughly demoralized Rhec, now fleeing pell-mell as the holocaust gained in fury. Few escaped. A completely shattered vanguard of the main army was only a mangled stain on the red desert, a growing stench under the sun.

But it was a tragic victory. The embrasure of the Glorians and Earth miners was a shambles. Alan realized how near they had come to being overwhelmed. Only Joe seemed unruffled and calm.

"Better send the seriously wounded up to Dr. DeHarries," Alan told him. "And get out some more para-tuotrol. We'll need it with the next attack. I'm going on up to the mines. And Joe—don't be startled. I'm going to use the traveling methods of the coordinators. So long!"

Concentrating his mental power, Alan projected a prismatic globe and with dazzling speed was soon lost to sight.

A tremor of awe ran through the Glorians at the sight of an Earthman enveloping himself in the shimmering sphere and sailing away with lightning speed.

"The chosen one!" a young Glorian exclaimed to his companions. "He has become one of the Older People! Now we shall triumph without doubt, for never have the Older People aided us before!" Immediately they began one of their endless cacophonous chants.

Yards away, where the lake of flame had enveloped the shambles, black billows of smoke whirled and ended lazily, spreading toward the lush jungle on the canal banks. Joe selected a group of miners to accompany him, and began searching among the sands for any one of the Glorian renegades who might have been killed. But as he expected, the Rhec had borne the brunt of the battle

and not their renegade Glorian leaders.

Nor could they find any of the disintegrators, or even pieces of them. True, only a few of the deadly weapons were in the hands of the attackers, but these were enough to give the struggle a ghastly seriousness.

At last, grimy and sun-scorched, Joe gave up the search and returned to the barricades, giving orders to clear it up. A mournful note crept into the Glorian chanting as they began to place their dead in silent rows.

ARRIVING at the mines, Alan went directly to the doctor's office. DeHarries was not there. Cleo, however, could be heard in the quadrangle beyond — the ceremonial quadrangle which had lain in abandoned ruins for centuries.

Alan was drawn by her voice as if by a magnet. As he left the house and entered the quadrangle his eyes widened in amazement.

"You have a profound curiosity, Luzbel!" Cleo was saying calmly to the coördinator, who minus his sphere of light stood by her side, regarding the girl gravely.

"It is our scientific will to knowledge," Luzbel said without expression.

"Nevertheless I cannot waste time trying to explain to you why the Glorian wounded should interest me," Cleo said with finality. "Men are men, Earthmen or Glorians. Both are fighting side by side, and dying!"

"Their lives, although alien, are important to you?"

Her eyes dark with impatience, Cleo turned as if casting about for an answer, and then she saw Alan. For a brief instant she paused, her alabaster face impassive, then she smiled.

"Explain to him—" She waved toward the coördinator. "I have work to do, and I'm afraid my little store of knowledge is far from adequate for his thirst."

The moment Luzbel gazed into Alan's eyes, the latter felt a tremendous telepathic force impinge upon his mind. Alan instantly guarded his mind, although he knew that Luzbel would not willingly violate it. *Greetings!* he sent forth, with a surge of power that startled Luzbel. *We Earthmen value intelligent life above all else . . . despite our wars, he added quickly, feeling quite illogical.*

Your thought power seems to have increased profoundly, Earthman. Luzbel

gazed at him with a quizzical expression in his brilliant eyes. *The power imparted to you exceeds our calculations!*

In every exchange, Alan replied cryptically, there's the element of the unpredictable. He shrugged his shoulders. *I knew that eventually you would become aware of the extent of my mental power. I choose to let you know now, Luzbel.*

Would you willingly let me contact your mind that I may gauge how great has been your progress?

Alan smiled frostily. *No, Luzbel. I choose not to let you enter my mind again.*

They stood in silence while Alan gazed about at the transformation Cleo had achieved in the quadrangle. The débris of centuries had been cleared out, and the ruin was now a neat expanse where improvised beds were sheltered from the murderous sun by coverings of insulated canvas. Portable oxygenators cooled the atmosphere and freshened it. Many of the Glorian women stood in attendance as the first of the wounded men began to arrive.

Alan saw Thurla among them, her wild hair a shimmering copper glory. Luzbel's eyes, too, were tinged with a strange new look as they followed her every move. Alan was startled as he noticed it, but he said nothing. He assisted in placing the wounded in the beds, and then returned to Luzbel who had not moved from the spot.

"This," he remarked aloud with a wave of the hand, "is the result of the first few hours. There are as many more dead down there. I have a plan that might end all this slaughter once and for all." He gazed speculatively at the coördinator. "You wouldn't be interested in a highly scientific experiment, would you?"

Unconsciously Alan's tone was almost taunting, but the emotional content of his thought failed to impress the coördinator. Only the scientific problem involved interested him.

Experiment? Perhaps I possess the answer already, Earthman.

Perhaps, Luzbel. I think not. Alan smiled quietly. *It concerns devising a directional beam powered by atomic concentration, employing Dr. DeHarries' B-11 cauterizing ray, but raised several hundred times its present magnitude.*

Even presential could not withstand it, Earthman.

Precisely, Luzbel.

It would obliterate the Rhecarian tribes, Earthman—and it would mean that I had interfered in your favor to determine yours and the Glorians' victory. This must not be. I have only the right to observe. The thought was frigid, forbidding.

On my honor, on the honor of my planet Earth, I give you my absolute promise that it will never be employed on any life native to Mars.

Where then will you employ it, if not against the Rhecarians?

That would make you partner to my purpose. I only ask you to impersonally solve a scientific problem with me.

With you? Luzbel's thought was tinged with pure intellectual contempt, as if it were unthinkable that the lesser mind of the Earthman could possibly be linked with the mind of a coordinator in scientific research.

EXASPERATION conquered Alan's habitual calm, as he felt the full impact of the cold, unemotional wave. In a flash of devastating mental synthesis he projected a series of thought equations from the sixth knowledge, the mind-shattering mathematics of the infinite, in stream after stream of pure thought. Then he sent the image of an immense interplanetary battleship of presential, very possibly on its way now—the spacer the Teutons had fashioned, with which they would willingly carry the struggle for Earth to two worlds.

Alan visioned the resulting havoc should they come into complete possession of the ore Ulmer had hidden for them. And finally, the technique of fashioning the machine for the B-11 directional beam began to form itself and flow toward the utterly startled mind of Luzbel, the coordinator.

Don't underestimate me, Luzbel, Alan flashed. Two worlds are facing extinction, and your damned repugnance toward emotion is not going to stop me from preventing those catastrophes. Your own people are facing extinction too! I know! Too long have you been hidden in your crystal cities beneath the surface, in your miraculous world of surpassing loveliness and intellectual exaltation. Thus far you have only had to deal with the Rhecarians and the Glorians. Well, the Rhecarians are our immediate problem, but the real and ultimate problem will concern the invaders from Earth. It's a problem that none of

you, save the Presence, can solve—and the Presence will not interfere!

Alan paused, and for the first time saw in the startled violet eyes of the coordinator a fleeting realization of the truth.

You know the secret of our people, Alan! It was the first time the coordinator had referred to him by name. You possess a mental power up to, and possibly including, the seventh knowledge! I possess only up to the tenth. I must know how you came by it!

His prodigious power of concentration instantly excluded everything, as he contacted the machine in the temple that recorded all that happened on Mars. The entire scene within the temple had been recorded faithfully, even to the infinitesimal accident of his sleeve pushing the marker to the three-quarter mark and the ordeal Alan had gone through. All was part of the endless record that only the Presence, and through him the coordinators, controlled.

After a while, Luzbel opened his eyes.

The Presence is already aware of what occurred, Alan. This has never happened before. That an Earthman should have such vast and dangerous knowledge is in itself a problem greater than any we have had in ages. The Presence in his infinite wisdom can be the only one to make a decision.

In the meantime, are you going to aid me in solving the problem of the directional beam or not? Alan asked. *Right now my world faces destruction, and my people annihilation. The Glorians face it too, and soon you will face it. Emotions or not, I aim to prevent this even if I have to defy the Presence!*

A look of awe came into Luzbel's eyes. *No one defies the Presence, Alan!*

The look of awe persisted.

I cannot act independently, Alan. No one defies the Presence!

CHAPTER SEVEN

"WHO DARES DEFY ME?"

TWO more days and nights passed, during which the frigid wind from the desert grew colder as it swept down the broad canal, shaking the fronds of the taajos trees until they hissed and crashed in torment. The expected main attack had not come.

The men grew restless and irritable. Was it to be a battle of endurance, Alan

wondered, or did those Glorian Rhec leaders have a more subtle campaign up their sleeve?

Three of the wounded men had died and the others tossed in delirium. DeHarries' home, the temple, and the priest houses were overcrowded with the Glorian population. Blankets were at a premium as the chill nights swept across the mesa.

Alan and the doctor, meanwhile, grappled endlessly with the problem of the B-11 directional beam; and although Alan's mind was preternaturally clear as he dipped into the third and fourth knowledges, the necessary factors just escaped him.

Luzbel projected his sphere of light several times, and sped far out over the desert wastes, apparently to "merely observe." If he had located the main Rhec army he gave no hint of it by action or thought. Always he returned to the mesa, and Alan could not help but notice that his gaze followed Thurla endlessly, as she helped in administering to the wounded.

Thurla was aware of it too. Once she turned in confusion, then hurried indoors and did not show herself again for many hours.

Alan wondered how much Luzbel knew of the events to come. He tried tentatively—only once—to seek the knowledge in the coordinator's mind. A barrier went up instantly, and a cold mental force sent Alan reeling backward.

Alan apologized, then thought calmly: *Damn you and your whole unemotional tribe, Luzbel.*

Luzbel did not even smile.

On the third day it became apparent why the Rhecarian threat did not materialize. The period of the Martian *zhoraol* was almost upon them. The winds from the north and west had been a herald. The sun, like a poor frightened ghost, made an attempt to peer through the blood-red dust that rose from the desert in a mile-high wall. The deluge beat at the canal's jungle with great wings, flattening it in seconds. There was no light but the lightning, no sound but the wind and sand.

Village, canal and desert all seemed to vanish behind the glittering avalanche of death. Even the mesa above took its share of the lashing. But they were prepared for it. The population was crowded into every available air-tight building, even into the mine itself. Lohss's observ-

atory dome resembled a huge, gory, dripping bubble. The great Martian summer had begun in earnest. The ice at the poles would melt completely now and the canals would be flooded.

"The Rhecs must have moved back to the hills, knowing this was coming," Alan remarked to the doctor. "But they'll be here again, the real attack this time. They'll throw everything at us before the floods prevent it."

And every man there was thinking the same thing.

THE fourth day and the fifth went by slowly before the storm began to abate. The men, impatient for action, began to grumble. Alan put them to work in the mine again, and that relieved the boredom. But already the food stocks had to be rationed, and the work improved the men's appetites.

Luzbel had disappeared, as he did periodically. In the evenings Cleo played at the piano for the Glorians who crowded into the house. The music was a welcome relief for Alan, whose weary mind even in the sixth knowledge screamed for relief as he labored with DeHarries at the B-11 ray.

On the fifth day, as the winds began to subside, Alan ventured down to the village in one of his projected spheres. He guided it with difficulty against the zooming wind and pelting sand, but managed to alight safely. He found Joe Patrik and his selected men safely enclosed in the Casino.

"Look here, Alan." Joe showed him three of the older types of disintegrators, which Alan remembered had been about to fall apart with corrosion. Now they were in perfect working order, with the added detail of five-foot presential screens behind which the gunners could hide. "If we can pick off a few of their disintegrators with these, it'll make the odds better. And then we always have the para-tuotrol. We've been making it up into grenades."

"Good going, Joe. What about the bridge entrance over the canal? Better tear it down."

"Already done, Alan. Not that it matters much. They'll probably get across, but it'll slow 'em down."

Alan nodded, tried to think of more details to be worked out, and then a startlingly magnificent thought stabbed his brain. "The rocket plane, Joe! Where is it?"

"What do you mean? There isn't any plane here. You know that!"

"But there is—the one that brought Mrs. DeHarries and Cleo. Have you forgotten?" Without waiting for an answer, Alan hurried outside, projected his sphere and, despite the tossing tempest, sped up to the mesa again. He found Cleo and spoke to her privately.

"You said the pilot barely managed to land you here. You said the magnetic storm nearly ruined the motors. Where's the plane now? Where did he land it?"

"On the expanse behind the temple," Cleo replied, startled at Alan's excitement. And despite the wind and driving sand, she threw on a heavy coat and accompanied him there.

But they found no rocket plane. They searched the mesa in every direction, encountering nothing but a wide terrain, desolate and empty. Nor could the pilot from V'Narol, now working in the mines with the others, tell Alan anything about it. In the excitement of the impending attack, the plane had been forgotten.

Forgotten—but now it was gone.

ON THE sixth day the storm subsided to a whisper, but still the dust-fine sand trickled and swirled until it seemed the planet would never be dust free again. Men died and others got well. Here and there quarrels sprang up over trifles, as the nervous tension increased. Some of the earth miners were for trekking across the desert to V'Narol for help.

"Across a hundred miles of dust desert?" Alan asked.

"It's been done before."

"I'll shoot the first man who tries to leave," Alan promised, and his chisel-cold voice could not be ignored. "Maybe that's just what the Rhecs want, to draw us out in the open or divide our forces."

"We'll be starving up here in another week," an Earthman muttered.

"A week's a long time. And remember, if those blacks can stand it down there with less food and no shelter, we can tighten another notch in our belts and bear it!" Alan's eyes were all brilliance, without color. The past week had left him gaunt and formidable. He hadn't shaved for four days. The intense mental power of his mind was like a scimitar as it cut down their objections.

"Alan—" It was a curiously soft voice close to him, and he felt a hand upon his arm. He turned and looked at Cleo.

"Alan, I've been wondering why you couldn't project a sphere and go to V'Narol yourself?"

"I've thought of it, Cleo." His voice became as soft as her own. "But I believe that my duty is here. I mustn't leave for a minute. Besides, I don't think we could expect help from V'Narol, even if it could reach us in time. No, we've got to work out our own destinies here."

A cry from one of the watchers at the cliff broke in upon their conclave. It was followed by a wild eerie yell from below, thin and attenuated by distance. Then a chorus of yells.

"It's the attack!" cried the guard at the cliff, peering down through binoculars. "The real one this time!"

To the watchers above it was as if a magic hand had placed a battle of Lilliputians under their noses. The desert was black with Rhecs as the jungle spewed them forth. They came across the canal at a dozen different points, to merge into a black tide that swept toward the village. Joe's disintegrators must have been at work, however, for the tide began to slow and waver and break, like the ocean upon a beach.

"All right, you men, you wanted action! There aren't enough weapons for you all, but—"

Alan's words were wasted. Already the men were rushing toward the Stairway, to assist Patrik's men below in whatever manner they could.

Volleys of atomo-rifles began to crackle with regularity. There was no confusion below; every man knew what he had to do. During the grim, nerve-racking wait, both the Earth miners and the Glorians had learned their individual tasks with precision. Now, as Alan gazed on death in miniature, he felt a part of the rising excitement.

He raised binoculars to his eyes, and saw what was largely responsible for stopping the black tide. Patrik had placed a couple of the disintegrators in the towering presential temple.

Alan gave a mental *Bravo!* even as he saw that the Rhecs had several of their own disintegrators—probably concealed in the jungle—trained upon the tower itself. It was beginning to glow a dull red. Alan didn't worry, knowing it would take a terrific barrage of disintegration to weaken presential.

"I'm going down there," he said calmly after a moment. Cleo, beside him, stiffened suddenly.

"Alan, look!" She was pointing far out over the desert to a tiny black dot that swiftly resolved itself into a stubby-winged craft that skimmed along the surface.

Alan raised the binoculars to his eyes once more. "There's your rocket plane!" he announced with a curious tightness in his voice. "It must be Khosan—he's the one who got it, of course!" Alan felt a sickness grow within him as the plane came nearer, sweeping low toward the scene of battle. It curved a little toward the presential tower, whose gunners were working havoc among the Rhecs.

"I was afraid of this! They must have got hold of para-tuotrol somehow—"

Then the explosion from below cut Alan's words short. The hit had been almost directly at the base of the presential tower, which now swayed and tottered and threatened to fall.

THE loss of life had been terrific, Alan could see at a glance. The terrain between the tower and the canal was literally a black carpet of Rhecarian bodies. The defenders, despite their barricade, had suffered too. The barricade was now a shambles and dozens of the defenders had died. The others were scurrying back to the Casino. A few of the wounded tried to crawl in that direction, then collapsed and lay still.

Alan shut his eyes against the scene and turned away. He couldn't think clearly any more. His brain had suffered beyond its capacity. He only knew that their battle was lost, with that single deadly rocket plane in the hands of the Glorian renegades.

"Alan!" It was Cleo again in a terrified gasp, as she pointed behind them. Alan turned and saw the plane returning in a long curve, heading back across the top of the mesa, then zooming—zooming low—

There was hardly time to think. They saw another load of para-tuotrol hurtling down, and they felt the concussion of it. The mine entrance this time. The observatory dome was no more; they saw fragments of it flying skyward. Alan remembered with a pang that he had told Lohss to stay there day and night. He remembered that many of the Glorian women and children had been quartered in the mine entrance to accommodate the overflow. . . .

"Come on," he gasped at Cleo in a

voice he could hardly recognize as his own, and began to run in that direction.

They heard the cries and screams before they reached there. The doctor and Mrs. DeHarries were already on the scene, and the injured were being removed to DeHarries' already overcrowded infirmary.

"Get back up to the house, Cleo—Alan. You can do more there." It was DeHarries who spoke, his voice grim and authoritative.

They hurried ahead of the long line of wounded, reaching the house in time to make things ready.

Then Alan saw Thurla.

She was one of the first arrivals, lying in a makeshift stretcher with a golden arm outflung, blood seeping through her hair to make a crimson glory of it.

"Alan!" Cleo cried as he darted forward. Then she bit her lip and stepped back a pace.

"Thurla!" Alan heard the word in his ear and felt a hand on his shoulder that sent him reeling backward. He looked up to see Luzbel there—Luzbel, who had appeared on the scene with customary abruptness. The coördinator knelt in an attitude of anguish, cradling Thurla's head in his two hands.

Alan started to speak, looked at Cleo in astonishment and then stepped to her side, as realization began to dawn.

Thurla had opened her eyes. She gazed at Luzbel's face so close to her own, and then smiled as if a part of his mind had gone out to her. Her outflung hand raised with an effort and touched his own.

Inside with her—quickly! Luzbel's thought crackled against Alan's, as he rose briskly.

They took her into DeHarries' own private laboratory, where the work on the B-11 ray had progressed. Thurla's injury was not serious, outside of the resulting loss of blood. Cleo ran to get bandages.

ALAN felt the overwhelming relief in Luzbel's mind, and something else.

Well, he thought with deliberate coldness, you have seen the result of you and your emotional kind, who will never interfere! This is only the beginning. With that rocket plane on the rampage the battle is lost for us now—and for you.

He would have said more, but Luzbel smiled at him—an almost human smile.

Alan, I must tell you something. I

have thus far refused to take part in your lives because I was fighting a battle within myself. I am the only one of the Eleven possessing emotion! I am atavistic. That's why I sent to contact our Glorians and you Earthmen; I was nearer to them and to you. I tried to down these purely human emotions, to become as the others, but now, after what has happened—

The communication was mental, but Thurla must have sensed the meaning of it. From where she lay on the cot her eyes never left Luzbel.

But will you not be punished for—well, for forsaking your way of life? Surely the Presence—

Alan stopped in mid-sentence.

Luzbel, the radiant coördinator, smiled slowly, with an ineffable sadness. Gone was the cold, utterly detached manner.

Alan, the thought came softly, we do not have your system of rewards and punishment. We are our own judges. The Presence knows all, but there is no need for punishment. You see, my emotions have come into being and I cannot return to my people. Not because I am barred or because I would be ostracized—but because now their way of life seems barren! Alan, I have fallen, as you would say it, in love.

Luzbel paused as if he were groping for the proper Earthian term.

And in so doing, I have found a new and greater extension of being than my other life could ever have offered!

Alan was speechless.

You say the battle is lost for you if you cannot stop the rocket plane, Luzbel continued. Then we must stop it. Thurla's life, the lives of all her people as well as you Earthmen, depend on it.

Alan found his speech at last. *The answer is here, Luzbel!* He waved around the laboratory. *Your faculties extend through the tenth knowledge, mine only through the sixth. I have grappled with the problem until my brain is weary of it, and I cannot grasp the equation. Perhaps you. . . .*

I have the answer already, Alan; it lies in the ninth knowledge. Briefly, the atom itself must not be shattered, but the outer sheath of electrons must be stripped without disruption of the ultimate atomic structure. Then you have transmutation, not disintegration. With the electrons propelled along your directional beam. . . .

There followed a stream of intricate

mathematical equations that made Alan's brain reel. Luzbel desisted, and glanced with interest at the work DeHarries and Alan had carried on. Presently he said, *Alan—I think you can be of aid to your brave Earthmen down by the canal. They need you.*

As Alan took the hint and hurried out of the room, for the first time a flooding warmth for the coördinator entered his heart.

HE ARRIVED below in time to see the roof of the Casino collapse with a roar and a shower of brilliant sparks. Patrik and his handful of remaining men, however, had escaped the holocaust and were now safely ensconced in the shattered ground floor of the pre-sential temple.

The tower of that building was now useless. It sagged at an uncanny angle and threatened at any moment to tear loose from its ragged framework.

"Hello, Alan." It was a different Patrik who spoke, as if he realized their ultimate defeat. "They dropped two calling cards here. The last one did that. Direct hit." He gestured upward. "Disintegrators are gone, of course."

Alan nodded, gazing about at the remaining men who attended to the wounded ones upon the floor. Outside, in the direction of the canal, there was no sound save the occasional moans of those not fortunate enough to die. The battle had ceased for the moment. Not a Rhecian was left alive on this side of the canal. Those Glorian leaders had accomplished their purpose, anyway, in silencing Patrik's disintegrators.

"Where'd the rocket plane go?" Alan asked.

Patrik gestured out toward the desert. "Back to their base, probably, for another load of para-tuotrol. We're licked, Alan. We never counted on them having para-tuotrol. The hell of it is, we've got to sit here and wait for it. A couple of more hits like the last one. . . ."

"What kind of talk is that!" Alan didn't raise his voice, but it was so vibrant it brought some of the men out of their lethargy. "I never expected to hear it from you, Patrik. Now listen, all of you! We've got the coördinators on our side! Don't ask me how, or why. I know it." He didn't tell them it was just one coördinator, and one who had returned from the ways of his own people. He continued, "Those Rhecs are merely de-

moralized for the moment. They'll be attacking again. We've got to hold them until—until the coordinators decide what to do."

"That rocket plane'll be back here in a matter of hours," one of the men spoke up. "I wonder what they'll decide about that?"

Alan didn't answer, but turned to Patrik. "What about those wounded out there? Get them in! And get those weapons. There are dozens out there we can use."

Joe Patrik spoke softly, very softly indeed. "It can't be done. We've tried. We've lost eight men in the attempt. We're cornered here and those Rhecs across the canal know it. We can't even make a retreat back to the cliff. They open up on us the moment we step outside."

"I'm going to try it. Cover me." Before Patrik could stop him, Alan had stepped outside and projected his sphere. Skimming the surface, he darted across the battle space where the town had once stood. He gathered the fallen weapons first, swooping to pick them up—heat beams, atomo-rifles, even a battered but still intact disintegrator which apparently had been blown from the tower. These he carried back to the waiting men, who watched in a mixture of awe and anxiety.

TWICE more he darted out for weapons, but remained unchallenged by the Rhecarians in the opposite jungle. He could feel their collective eyes upon him. Perhaps they thought him invulnerable, or else were overcome by a superstitious awe. Certainly they were not unfamiliar with the color spheres which they had seen over the desert many times.

Alan concentrated on the wounded next, gathering them up two at a time in the levitational field of his globe, then zooming to the edge of the cliff where he left them in the care of DeHarries and his helpers. Three, four, a dozen times he made the trip. *Just a modern he-Val-kyrie*, he thought without humor, and collapsed in utter exhaustion as the blood-red sun neared the horizon's rim.

He rested a while, then stood up and gazed below, where sporadic firing had begun. The Rhecarians were making another attempt to storm across the canal.

"Just one more thing to do," Alan said aloud. "Then we can rest—and wait."

For what he hoped would be the last time, he zoomed down to where the presential temple stood gaunt and alone, a battered but defiant hulk.

The defenders were holding their own, thanks to the weapons Alan had gathered in, but he saw it would be only a matter of time. The canal was already choked with Rhecarian bodies but still they came across, trying to circle in from the desert as well.

Patrik was his old self again, as he huddled near a crate of para-tuotrol to be used as a final desperate measure, while his two hands operated an atomorfie with deadly accuracy.

He grinned a hello at Alan but didn't stop firing, as he said, "We'll hold 'em, Alan—but tell those coordinators to hurry and make up their minds before that rocket plane returns! Hell, with all their knowledge they ought to have the answer—"

"Is this all that's left of the para-tuotrol, Joe?"

Patrik nodded his head, but didn't stop firing for a moment.

"All right," Alan said, "this is our last stand. I want every man of you to get back to the cliff and up the Stairs!"

Patrik whirled, and his right eyebrow and shoulder went up together. "What—an' leave th' way clear for those black devils? I'd rather die here!"

"That's exactly what you'll do if you don't obey orders! I have a plan. You'll help me with it later. All the wounded have been taken to the mesa. The town here is a shambles and there's no food except above! Soon these Rhecarians will be starving and will attempt to take the mesa once and for all. Do you understand?"

"No," Joe said dryly. "I don't, but you're the boss." He gave the orders to his men while Alan broke open the para-tuotrol. With the deadly stuff tied around his waist and thrust into every pocket, Alan projected a sphere, stepped into the open and quickly soared above the scene of battle. He dropped one bundle where the Rhecs were massed thickest on the desert side of the canal. The resulting havoc allowed Patrik's men to gain the open and make their way toward the cliff.

ALAN covered their retreat, using the para-tuotrol as sparingly as possible. Twice more he dropped the deadly bundles into the black ranks

who swarmed after them, until the terrain was a welter of mangled flesh and erupting sand. With an awful fanaticism the Rhecs clambered over their own dead. Green hair flowing and yellow eyes glinting evilly in the reddish sun, they were determined to cut off this retreat.

The defenders had gained the Stairs now, but the Rhecs were closing the intervening space.

Alan needed that para-tuotrol for his final plan, but he couldn't spare it now. Like an avenging demon he propelled his color sphere across the advancing tide, letting loose his bundles of death with abandon. The resulting explosions tossed his sphere about like a feather on a wave.

That alone, perhaps, saved his life, for now the Rhecs were concentrating their fire on him. Alan could hear the peculiar whine of electro beams passing near, and the *zing* of atomo-bullets, that missed him and exploded high against the cliff behind him. A few of these passed so close that they must have entered his sphere. Alan realized that it wasn't impervious after all. He tried not to think of the result should one of those bullets find its mark, with all that para-tuotrol strapped to him!

Even as he continued to strafe the black advance, he glanced back and saw that Patrik's men on the Stairs had almost reached the midway ledge. One of them toppled, clutching at his breast, and plunged headlong to the desert below. Two more followed, an Earthman and a Glorian. The Rhecs were beginning to find the range now.

Patrik was urging them on, waving his arms wildly. They gained the safety of the ledge and scurried out of range, just as another Earthman sank down clutching at his leg. His companions pulled him in.

Alan swept in a wide curve and alighted beside them, as two more atomo-bullets exploded dangerously near him.

The Rhecs had gained the bottom of the Stairs now and were swarming upward.

"We can hold them now, Alan! They won't get this far!" It was Patrik who spoke, his eyes wild with excitement. Already his men were at the ledge, picking off the Rhecarians like flies, and enjoying it to the very depths of their souls.

"You think so? Come with me, Patrik—

we have work to do!" Alan told him.

He led Patrik through Ulmer's former abode and down into the main tunnels of the cliff.

Not until then did Patrik realize Alan's final desperate plan. He said in a pleading voice, "No, Alan, don't do it. After all, it isn't necessary. We can hold them till doomsday!"

"But we've got to be ready, Joe, in case you can't. Even then it won't be victory—it'll just be a respite. The final victory doesn't lie in our hands."

In grim silence they finished their work, then returned to the ledge to help the others.

With dramatic suddenness the sun was gone behind the desert, as though weary of the scenes it had looked upon that day. Phobos began to appear, a great golden disk upon the horizon, casting long shadows before it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FIGHT TO THE FINISH

THROUGHOUT the long hours of that night the battle continued, until it was like a hell's cauldron boiling over. Alan was everywhere, firing through his transparent sphere of light like an angel of death. But even so, hours before the end, he saw what must inevitably come.

Hunger and desperation lent the Rhecarians a fury they had never shown before. They realized, too, that the mesa was one objective they had to take before they could sweep on to V'Narol.

Once they succeeded in getting almost a third of the way up to the ledge. The defenders let them come, spreading out along the ledge and holding their fire. Then they mowed them down with terrific fire from the center and sides, with the help of a single bundle of para-tuotrol Patrik had saved. He looked regretfully at his empty hands after he threw it.

But where scores fell, hundreds more were ready to take their place.

Volunteer groups of Glorian women brought food and coffee down to the defenders, and would have stayed to help them—but there were not enough weapons. Alan saw Cleo among them.

Alan nodded, his face a conflict of emotions. "Go back to them, Cleo. Tell Luzbel to hurry. We can't hold out here much longer!"

The men became aware of it, too, as

gradually their ammunition gave out.

At last Alan called Patrik to one side.

"In five minutes exactly, order a full retreat. Clear up to the mesa, every man of you. Let the Rhecarians have the Stairway."

Patrik knew what that meant, and nodded dumbly as he watched Alan race back toward the tunnels.

In the allotted five minutes the final retreat began, the defenders racing up the steps in concerted movement. For a full minute the surprised Rhecarians didn't move. Then, emboldened by the clear route before them, they rose from cover and with a crescendo of yells raced upward in pursuit until the great ceremonial Stair was packed all the way from the bottom. A few of them even gained the top of the mesa and were met in fierce close-range fighting, almost hand to hand.

"He'd better hurry!" Patrik gasped aloud, thinking of Alan. His own heat beam brought down a charging Rhec and he whirled to meet others who were clambering over the edge of the cliff. . . .

And then it happened.

THE night was so clear that the ear-splitting roar might have been heard all the way to V'Narol. The earth shook beneath the men's feet and immense pieces of rock hurtled outward from the cliff side. Immediately after, three more explosions catapulted the Stairway into space, while a curtain of flaming rocks spread over the desert below. The last explosion had been very close indeed, and the entire upper part of the Stairs remained intact as it moved outward end over end, a two-hundred-foot piece of rock with a few Rhecarians still clinging to it. It seemed to sink to the desert very gently, but men died under that gentleness.

Patrik peered out into the deepening dusk, and glimpsed Alan's colorful sphere some three hundred yards away, dodging pieces of rock that still hurtled about him.

"Thank God," Patrik whispered fervently. "For a moment I thought—"

And then every woman and child, every Earth miner and Glorian warrior was at the cliff edge looking with awe at the flaming scene below. Alan moved in and alighted beside them. He sought out Cleo, and unconsciously his arm went about her shoulders. . . .

For a long time after, the sound of the

explosions remained in their ears, and the clatter of rocks and fragments as minor avalanches continued down the cliff side. Then the diminishing sound was replaced by another—different—faint at first but growing nearer.

Alan's quickened senses heard it first.

It was the sound of rocket motors.

"The rocket plane is returning," he announced in a voice that was devoid of all emotion. "Down into the mine, everyone. Quickly! Some of the tunnels are still intact."

The populace began a hurried but orderly retreat. They had learned their lesson well from the last attack. Only Cleo remained, and DeHarries and Patrik. Alan didn't argue with them, but raced for DeHarries' house. He found Luzbel in the lighted laboratory, with Thurla at his side where she had remained during the long hours.

"I know, Alan," Luzbel said in a voice that was but a whisper. "With a part of my mind I have been aware of all that has transpired. The rocket plane is returning. This will be the final blow." His emotion was such that he spoke aloud.

"You mean—you can't complete the ray?"

"To perfect it, Alan, would be a task of a week at least. I begin to wish that I had not turned from the ways of my own people. So much is expected of me in so little time!" He seemed to collapse where he stood, leaning forward against a table for support. Thurla stood there, somber, dry-eyed.

"Then we lose after all," Alan said ironically. "After all we've gone through, we lose! Even the mine can't stand up under persistent para-tuotrol bombing. Ulmer's worked the supports paper-thin. That one lone plane can wipe us out!"

AS IF in mocking affirmative, the sound of the plane came nearer. There could be no doubt now that it was headed directly for the mesa. Alan moved for the door, aware that Luzbel followed him slowly.

DeHarries, Cleo and Patrik were outside, gazing toward the desert. The flame of the rockets could be seen now, stark against the gathering darkness. The roar became deafening in their ears. The plane itself was only a vague shadow as it zoomed low, and lower still.

"We'd better get inside," Alan said dully, but he did not move nor did the

others about him. Phobos had risen high enough to send golden lances of light from the soaring curves of the Glorian temple.

Beautiful, Alan thought to himself—and then the beauty was shattered. They glimpsed the first load of para-tuotrol hurtling down. They felt the concussion and saw the temple shudder almost like a living thing. Slowly, gently, it sank to one side. Then, as the earth gave way, it disappeared with a sound that didn't reach their ears until seconds later.

The coördinator touched Alan's arm and drew him inside. There was a grim resolve on his face. "There is only one way, Alan."

"I have progressed with the ray, but I have not perfected it. It is a powerful weapon, perhaps too powerful in its present stage. I can propel the electrons along the directional beam, but I cannot control them, or stop them. An automatic stop must be worked out later."

"But right now it means—"

"At the present stage it means that I can only use the beam once. The weapon will be useless after it is used."

Alan pondered a moment.

"It will be useless because every atom within immediate contact of the directional beam will be employed—in a flash, drawn into the beam itself. Even the atoms of the weapon itself, and—" he gave a laugh—"perhaps even of the user."

As the significance of this burst upon Alan's brain, Luzbel was already mantling the B-11. It consisted of the snub-nosed weapon Alan already knew, with its bank of violet tubes. But now, in addition to these, there were several more tiny ones of intricate design that swirled with a perpetual silvery radiance. A further addition, too, was the six-foot metal sheath that matched every curve of Luzbel's body and fitted him snugly.

Alan might as well have tried to stop the rocket plane barehanded as to stop Luzbel then. The coördinator brushed him aside as he strode for the door. He stopped only long enough to hold Thurla very close to him for a moment. Then he was gone into the darkness, and a few seconds later they saw his luminous sphere wafting him up and out over the desert.

THE rocket plane had completed its customary long curve and was heading back. The watchers could see Luzbel's sphere speeding outward and

upward to intersect the plane's path. Phobos had risen to its full glory now, and was like a white spotlight on the scene.

The plane came onward recklessly, its tubes trailing fire. But Luzbel's speed didn't diminish, as he swept upward on a long tangent. It seemed that the two would crash. . . .

It was the plane that deviated, sweeping suddenly upward so that its rocket fire touched Luzbel's globe and drove it sharply down. For a moment the sphere spun merrily and hurtled earthward as though out of control. Then it stopped, poised, and surged upward again.

Alan began to breathe freely once more. The man in the plane must be Khosan, he knew; that renegade had often shown an utter unconcern, even contempt, for the color spheres. Now the plane was curving, heading back, its original mission forgotten for the moment.

But this time it met more than a color sphere. The entire sky for a half-mile radius around Luzbel's globe had taken on the vivid, swirling color energy which Alan had seen so many times. Even as the plane rushed to meet it, the color expanded, reaching out. . . .

Now Alan could glimpse the white streak of atomo-bullets as they entered the color zone, fired from the plane's forward turret. They must have missed their mark, however. There was no telling where, inside that mile zone, Luzbel's own sphere lay in wait. And the plane could not check its course in time. It tried to. Zooming sharply to the left, it still entered the outer fringes of the zone. . . .

The motors ceased their rhythmic hum and for a single instant the plane hung suspended in a net of force.

For one second the universe seemed to stand still, and in the next everything happened. A single lancet of blue came out of nowhere, to limn the rocket plane in a glorious halo. The beam seemed to dissolve upon itself and even the mile-wide color zone disappeared in a rush of inward energy. Simultaneously a dark form hurtled earthward. Only Alan's eyes saw it. Then a sphere of living light enveloped it and Luzbel descended gently to the ground.

The rocket plane, a bluish dissolving ghost, swept straight toward the desert.

And the resulting para-tuotrol explosion rocked the very cliff beneath their feet.

MOMENTS later Luzbel stood beside him. The B-11 weapon was gone and his right arm hung limp and useless, a ghastly burn having shredded the flesh. Thurla, her face a mask of anguish, ran to get unguent and bandages, while DeHarries examined the arm. He shook his head seriously.

"We'll be lucky if we can save that arm."

"Only the coördinators can do that. I think I shall ask them." Luzbel smiled through his pain. "I told you every atom would be employed, Alan. I was lucky. Only the shield saved me."

"But the weapon is gone. The B-11—"

"There will not be another Rhecarian uprising for centuries, Alan. Perhaps never. Peace has come to Mars."

"Not yet! The battle for Earth will be carried here. We still must dispose of the Teuton spacer now on its way."

"We can build another B-11—two, three, a dozen of them. Despite my emotions I have interfered enough, Alan. You have within your knowledge the solution to the problem. It is for you to find it and bear the responsibility now. Much more than that is yours, if you wish it. Alan—the Presence has directed me to offer you the eleventh coördinatorship in my place."

Alan stood there, too struck by the magnificence of the offer to move. He knew what it would mean. His life span would be increased to three hundred years at the outset, and more as he progressed. He would undergo the mental process of the machine again, this time to the very limit. But now he felt that his mind was capable of it, and much more. The limits of his knowledge would be endless.

"If you accept," Luzbel went on, "you will undergo a rigid training until you

are able to communicate directly with the Presence. Then your immediate task will be to aid in solving the problem of our people. They are facing extinction through uncontrolled development and mutation. Their mental state precludes any other evolution."

"And I would become a part of that evolution? Yes, it's inevitable. My emotions—"

Alan turned to Cleo, standing very straight and still. Her face was a mask. It was obvious she didn't want to interfere with Alan's decision—but she couldn't hide the anguish in her eyes . . . and something else.

"Tempting as the offer is, I must refuse. I hope the Presence won't mind."

"He won't mind. He merely must make other plans. It was thought that a definite link should be established with Earth, now that our destinies are mutual—and what better link than an Earthman for a coördinator?"

Alan and Doctor DeHarries looked at each other, and the idea must have struck them at the same instant.

"Our Commander!" Alan exclaimed. "The Commander of our Hemispheric Coalition, Luzbel. He's directed our cause this far, and now that it appears victory is ours—what will be left for him? He's a great scientist, Luzbel, but a weary and forlorn figure. This coördinatorship would be right down his alley!"

"It may be arranged, Alan. The Presence will review the facts."

He turned and took Thurla into his uninjured arm. For the moment she didn't seem to miss the other one.

"You know, Luzbel, it's hard to believe you were once a coördinator," Alan replied, as he and Cleo walked out into the night that was brightened for him by her presence. . . .





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READER, I HATE YOU!

By HENRY KUTTNER

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“Reader, I hate you—but my career is in your hands. Give Superman Upjohn’s wife back to him—before I starve to death!”

READER, I hate you. I don’t know what your name is —Joe or Mike or Forrest J—but I mean you, the little guy who buys all the magazines with Finlay pictures and Kuttner stories. The one who went into a bar somewhere a few months ago with a copy of *Astonishing* under his arm and ordered a Horse’s Neck. The one, in par-

ticular, who met Mr. Upjohn and stole his wife, in the form of a chartreuse crystal.

I hope to high heaven you read this yarn. Mr. Finlay and I are making sure you do, insofar as we can. Why in hell did you take that crystal, anyhow? You should have known that Upjohn was tighter than an issue with an all-star lineup and a full quota of ads. It's all your fault. I hate you. If you don't give up your ill-gotten spoils, you'll never see another Finlay pic or Kuttner story as long as you live—God help us both. And if I could get my hands on you—

Didn't you know you were talking to a *superman*?

Anyhow, read this. Read about how you got us in trouble with Mr. Upjohn, of all people. You'll remember him, unless that Horse's Neck hit you too hard. A fat, bald guy with a button of a nose and mild blue eyes and platinum teeth. We met him in a bar too.

IT WAS the Pen & Pencil, near Times Square. Finlay and I were discussing the future of science fiction.

"It stinks," I said.

"What it needs," he said, "are more artists like—"

"Yeah," I said, "and more writers like me."

"You," Finlay said, looking at me. "You—"

"So do you," I came back. "Let's have another Cuba Libre. The bubbles tickle my nose."

"You're thinking of champagne."

"I'm dreaming of champagne," I corrected. "My Uncle Rupert has a cellar full of the best. I hope he dies."

Finlay looked interested. "Will he leave the champagne to you? Is that why you hope he dies?"

"No," I said sadly. "I just don't like him. And I got a yarn to write by Saturday. Want to hear the plot?"

"I've heard it," Finlay growled, and investigated his Cuba Libre.

"Not this one."

"I have. Often." He licked his moustache reflectively. I twirled mine, hoping he'd notice. It's longer.

Then Mr. Upjohn came along and looked down at us. He was as I have described. You'll remember, you rat.

"Excuse me," he said, "but that bartender said you were connected with fantasy."

"How do you mean, 'connected'?" Finlay asked, rearing back. However, I be-

lieve in being polite to strangers, who often read magazines anyhow, so I said that we were.

"I know!" the button-nosed guy came back, quick as a flash. "Frank R. Paul and Leigh Brackett."

Finlay and I looked at each other. Then we had a drink together. He does not look at all like Frank Paul, who has a somewhat blunt-featured, happy-looking face. Finlay misses on both counts. Nor do I look like Leigh Brackett.

"Listen," I said, "Leigh Brackett isn't a—"

"Oh, don't apologize," he said in a friendly way. "I'm a superman myself."

"Why do these things have to happen, H. K.?" Finlay asked me.

"V. F., I just don't know," I said. "But they do. We'll have another round and maybe this superman will whiz off."

"No," said the superman, "I won't do that. Because you can help me. I'm trying to find two people—an artist and a writer."

"You mean a writer and an artist," I said, stung. "Who are they?"

"Virgil Finlay and Henry Kuttner," the superman explained.

Finlay choked on his drink.

"They're not real," he pointed out hastily. "They're figments. Just pseudonyms, that's all."

"I don't believe that," he remarked.

"Okay," I said, "that's us. Now what's the gag?"

He brightened considerably. "Really? Oh, good, good! I'm Mr. Upjohn. That's not my name, of course, but when I'm on the outer crust of the Earth I assume a human title along with everything else."

"I know just how you feel," I told him sympathetically. "It's very, very seldom that I turn into a bat in Times Square."

Mr. Upjohn signaled the waiter and ordered a boilermaker. "I'm in trouble," he said. "My wife has been stolen."

Finlay and I regarded each other.

"No," we said as one. "We didn't do it. We have wives."

"Where's your wife?" Finlay asked me as an afterthought.

"I don't know," I said, "but I think she went shopping with your wife."

He agreed morosely. "It's a feminine instinct."

I sighed. "Yes. While we sit here, sweating and slaving, working our fingers to the bone—"

"We could take in stairs to wash," Finlay suggested.

"No. There'd be splinters," I said tersely, and that ended the discussion.

Mr. Upjohn broke in. "Let me tell you about it," he pleaded. "If you don't, I'm apt to destroy you, and I really don't want to do that."

"Bah!" I said. "Am I a ninety-pound weakling?"

"Yes," Finlay said. "Go on, destroy him, Mr. Upjohn."

"I don't want to."

"I'll bet you can't," I jeered. "Nuts to you."

He pointed his index finger at my Cuba Libre.

It vanished, glass and all. . . .

"Sleight of hand," I said, crawling out from under the table and resuming my chair. "It means nothing. However, we'll listen to your story, purely out of courtesy. Bring back my drink while you're at it."

"I can't do that," Mr. Upjohn said, "but I can order another."

"Will you pay for it?" I demanded shrewdly.

"Yes," he said, and did. I began to like Mr. Upjohn.

"IT WAS this way," he started. "I'm a superman, as I said. One of the few existing at the moment on Earth."

"There are others?" I asked.

"Sure. You've read *Odd John*?"

"Yes. Good writer, Stapledon."

"Well," said Mr. Upjohn, "then you know that mutations are born all the time. Some of them are supermen, specimens of the more highly evolved race that one day will people the world. I'm one such. We're born before our time, so we just hang around and wait for the rest of us to come along. We're immortal."

Finlay put his head in his hands.

Mr. Upjohn continued.

"We're marking time. We amuse ourselves. I built a spaceship, for example, in my cellar." He looked depressed. "That was a bit of a mistake. I couldn't get it out of the cellar."

"What did you do?" I asked, not really interested.

"Oh, I went down," he said. "A slight readjustment turned it into an earth-borer. This planet happens to be hollow, so I broke through the crust and came out in the inner world. A strange place. I visit it often."

"You do," Finlay said. "Oh, God."

Mr. Upjohn smiled, and I noticed that he had platinum teeth. He saw my glance. "Recapped 'em myself. My own teeth look quite inhuman and I didn't want to attract attention."

"I thought you said you changed your shape when you came to Earth," I said.

"Not my teeth, however. . . . Where was I? Oh, yes. There's a form of silicate life there resembling human beings. They grow differently, though—from crystals. Very lovely, the women. Especially the ones from chartreuse crystals."

"What's chartreuse?" I asked.

Finlay kindly explained that it was a pale green. Mr. Upjohn went on.

"Under the right radiations, the crystals bud and grow, much like human beings."

"Crystals?" I murmured.

"Originally. The basic genes and chromosomes are atomically arranged in a crystalline pattern. The human organism originally is little else, you know. And after the initial stage is passed the development would seem quite normal to you."

"I'm sure of it," I said hopelessly.

"So, anyway, I chose one of the prettiest of the crystals to be my wife. I invented a machine for forced growth, went down to the interior of the Earth, and got the crystal I'd picked. And brought it—her—back with me. Then I celebrated. . . . I fear I celebrated too much."

"You mean you got drunk," Finlay said, anxious to clarify every detail.

"Yes," Mr. Upjohn said, "I got drunk." He sounded sad. "I went into a bar somewhere—"

"Around here?"

"I don't know. I get around fast—teleportation. It might have been San Francisco or Detroit or Rochester. I haven't the slightest idea. Yes," Mr. Upjohn finished, "I was drunk. Liquor effects supermen a lot, somehow."

"Not only supermen," I said, having another.

"So I went into this bar, and ran into a little guy who kept ordering Horse's Necks. I got acquainted with him. We talked. He had a magazine under his arm, and talked about that."

"What did he look like?" Finlay asked.

Mr. Upjohn shook his head. "I haven't the slightest idea. His face was a blur. Oh, I was drunk! *Tsk!* I let drop the fact that I was a superman, and he just laughed. Said there was no such thing.

I picked up his magazine and said I could show him far more fantastic things than it had in it."

"And could you?" I inquired.

"I wonder," Mr. Upjohn muttered. "I said so, anyhow. I told him about the last time I took my ship to the interior of the Earth and one of the giants picked it up."

"Giants?"

"Yes. There are a lot of them down there. They have horns and pointed ears. Anthropoid, rather, but not very intelligent. Savages, living in nomadic tribes. Anyhow, as I say, this yellow one picked up my spaceship like a toy, and I had to climb out and burn his nose with my ray-gun before he let go. I told this—ah—fan about that. He didn't believe it."

"Oh?" Finlay said.

Mr. Upjohn sighed. "He said it was old stuff. And he showed me his magazine—it was called *Astonishing*, I remember. There was a girl on the cover with a lot of jewels floating around her—you painted it, Mr. Finlay—and it illustrated a story called *The Crystal Circe*."

"Me," I said excitedly. "Me. I wrote it. How'd you like it?"

"Oh, I didn't read it," Mr. Upjohn said. "I prefer realism myself. But this fan said he always bought magazines with Finlay pictures or Kuttner stories. Which, of course, is why—"

THE WAITER brought another round. Presently out guest continued.

"I'm ashamed to admit how tight I was, but I do recall telling the fan over and over about my adventure with the giant. And finally I showed him the chartreuse crystal—my wife. And—" Mr. Upjohn blushed—"I—ah—I gave it to him."

"Why?" Finlay asked.

"I was drunk," the superman said simply.

"Well," I said, "I gather you want your wife back before she hatches."

"She won't hatch—not without the right radiations. The worst of it is I don't remember where I met this fan or what his name is. Joe or Mike or Forrest J—something like that, I can't recall. But he *did* have a copy of *Astonishing*, and he is a Finlay and Kuttner fan."

"Obviously a man of intelligence," Finlay and Kuttner said as one.

"I want my wife back," Mr. Upjohn remarked.

I looked at the platinum teeth. "That shouldn't be very hard. You're a superman."

"I'm not that super. We have our limitations. Now here's the idea, gentlemen. I've got to get in touch with that fan and ask him to return my wife—the chartreuse crystal. I've only one means of contact with him. You two, and the magazine."

"I don't get it," I said.

"It's simple enough. Mr. Kuttner, I'd like you to write this episode exactly as it's happened. Mr. Finlay, I'd like you to illustrate the scene I've described. The fan, attracted by the picture, will buy the copy of *Astonishing* inevitably, and having read the circumstances, will return the crystal to me in care of the editor."

"Look," Finlay said, "I don't work that way. A giant clutching a spaceship—hal! There's no cover material in that."

"It's a *big* giant," Mr. Upjohn said.

"No. Besides, how do I know what it's supposed to look like?"

"Big, with horns and large pointed ears. All iridescent yellow, you know."

"It won't do," I broke in. "Stories aren't written like that, and if they were, they wouldn't sell. Suppose I did what you suggested and simply recorded this incident as it happened? Do you know the editor of *Astonishing*?"

"No," Mr. Upjohn murmured.

"I do," I said simply.

The superman looked at us in a depressed fashion.

"It happened, you know," he said. "The giant grabbed my ship, and I crawled out and burned his nose till he dropped it."

"The nose?" Finlay asked stupidly.

"The ship."

"Weren't you hurt?"

"I'm indestructible," Mr. Upjohn said. "Different atomic structure."

"In any case, no," I said. "You should know better than to ask us—"

"But I *am* asking you. And I have the power to back up my demands. With a very slight expenditure of vital energy I could reduce you both to pinches of grayish ash."

"Oh, have a drink," Finlay said, getting disgusted. Mr. Upjohn complied. The liquor seemed to hit him at once.

"Shoop—supermen react quickly to alcohol," he explained, blinking at us. "Too bad. But it wears off in a hurry."

"No hangover?" I inquired.

"No," he said. "I'm a sh—superman."

"Anyhow," I said, "we can't help you. Stories aren't written like this—salable ones at least. You got to have a plot."

"No," Mr. Upjohn decided. "That would spoil it. All I want is for you to write down what happened."

"Like Saroyan," I said. "No, my good man, I can't. I must preserve the artistic unities. Besides, I couldn't get a check for the yarn."

Finlay was lapping at his Cuba Libre. "Same way about the illustration. A picture has to illustrate a scene in the story. I don't see any yellow giants playing with spaceships."

"Nobody would believe it," I said. "Even as fiction. You might as well say that, by a pure, raw coincidence, the guy in the next booth is the one who swiped your wife."

Finlay rose and peered into the next booth. "No," he told us. "No, there's only a little guy here drinking a Horse's Neck and playing with a marble or something." He sat down again.

We did a double-take.

"A marble? I said. "What color?"

"Omigod," Finlay cried in a heartfelt manner. "Chartreuse!"

WE STARED at Mr. Upjohn, who returned our gaze in an owlish and distracted fashion.

"S'all a lie," he muttered. "There is no Earth. You get my crystal or I'll destroy you both. Wife-stealers, thass what. *Urp!*" He slid forward gently and lay with his face on the table. It proved impossible to rouse our drunken superman.

"Well, maybe it isn't a raw coincidence," Finlay said.

"If it's the same guy—"

"Mr. Upjohn might have subconsciously come back to the same bar where he first met him."

"Yeah," we said, and pondered. After a while Finlay broke the silence.

"I wonder what did happen?"

"Our friend Upjohn is an alley peddler, maybe. He ran into this little guy and offered him an emerald cut-rate because it was hot. An old gag. Down on East Fifth, in Los Angeles, they used to sell diamonds that had been smuggled in from Tia Juana. They were fakes, naturally."

"Then why does Mr. Upjohn want it back?"

"It'd take Dash Hammett to figure that one out," I said, having another drink. "This is how murders always start—by

chance encounters in bars. When we leave, we'll probably run into a corpse weltering in its own gore."

Finlay eyed me intently. "Weltering?"

I made helpless gestures, not feeling up to explaining it. "Oh—weltering. Sort of floundering. What the hell does it matter, anyhow? We're talking about this hunk of green ice."

"It wasn't an emerald. I could tell."

"Was there a blonde babe in it?" I inquired, growing ironic. "Are you starting to fall for Mr. Upjohn's yarn?"

"The superman?" Finlay laughed.

"Let's wake him up. If he wants that chartreuse crystal back, it's right here in the next booth."

"Perhaps," I hedged. "Don't count on it."

"Think Mr. Upjohn made up the whole story?"

"I dunno. Let's ask him. *In vino veritas*. That is Latin."

Finlay grunted skeptically. He leaned toward Mr. Upjohn and shouted in his ear—feeling, as he afterwards said, like Humpty-Dumpty addressing his messenger.

"About that giant—"

"It has green eyes," said Mr. Upjohn, startled. "Don't forget, two little piles of grayish ash. I can do it, too." He instantly fell asleep again.

"Ha," Finlay said. "A yellow giant with green eyes. Against a lavender background, I suppose. Well? What'll we do with Mr. Upjohn?"

"We could put him in a teapot," I said, "if we had a teapot."

Mr. Upjohn did not, apparently, waken, but his voice said quietly, "I'll take steps to make sure you do what I want. I'll put a hypnotic compulsion on you both. Neither of you will be able to do a lick of work till you've fulfilled my commission."

"Delirious," I said briefly. "Let's go see the guy in the next booth."

Finlay rose and peered. "He's gone."

"I'll trail him," I said, hastily heading toward the door. "Take care of the check and follow me."

"We'll let Mr. Upjohn do that," Finlay suggested, keeping pace with me. "Where's our quarry? He couldn't have gone far."

HE HADN'T. We saw the little man getting into a taxicab at the curb. We heard him say, "Grand Central Station."

"Well—" I said indecisively.

"Why not?" Finlay asked me. We were both intrigued, I guess. At any rate, we felt like asking the little guy a question or two. So we piled into another taxi.

"Grand Central," I said.

It was late afternoon. Snow was starting to come down. We cut along 42nd, Times Square on our left, dimmed out as usual, and turned into the taxi dock by Grand Central. Our quarry was disappearing into the station. We ran after him. He headed for the Oyster Bar with the air of man lusting for oysters, but stopped to glance at his watch. Then he scurried to a row of lockers, fumbled out a key and extricated a couple of small suitcases. By that time we were beside him.

"Hey," I said. "We want to talk to you."

He looked frightened. "Sorry. My train's leaving."

Finlay seized one arm, I got the other.

"This'll only take a minute," Finlay said. "Don't yell for a redcap. We want to know where you got that chartreuse crystal you were playing with in the Pen & Pencil."

"Is it *stolen*?" he asked, wide-eyed. "The man who gave it to me—"

"Mr. Upjohn?"

"Yes, that was his name. Are you detectives? I—I'm in New York on business, just for a few days. And I really must get back home. My train—"

"The crystal," I said.

He tried to pull free. "My train's pulling out! Gentlemen, if the jewel's stolen I—"

"No," Finlay said, "it isn't stolen. We want to ask you some questions, that's all."

The little man fished something out of his vest pocket and thrust it into my palm. Instinctively I clutched it. It was warm and velvety, large as a big plum, and seemed to vibrate gently.

"Keep it!" the little guy said. "It's enchanted anyway." Then he pulled free and fled, his suitcases jouncing as he scuttled off.

Finlay and I looked after him and then turned to examine what I held in my palm. It was the chartreuse crystal, all right. It felt funny as hell.

My hand tingled.

"Here," I said hastily. "You try it." I handed it to Finlay—and the crystal jumped away from us. It didn't fall. It *jumped*.

It landed on the floor, and we dived

for it. The crystal slid away. It drifted off like water, or like a mouse flitting off to its hole. My stomach tried to jam itself into my sinuses.

That damn crystal ran away from us through Grand Central Station.

The station was crowded, as usual, and we were handicapped. We ran after it, jostling our way. I got an umbrella rib in my ear, and Finlay ran full tilt into a fat man with a derby hat and sent them both flying. Meantime the crystal skittered around toward the Oyster Bar, flowed down a ramp and glided toward one of the train gates.

So the little guy had said it was enchanted, eh? He was right!

It went through the gate. We went after it, ignoring a Brooklyn accent that demanded our tickets. We raced along the platform. A train was pulling out into the long tunnel.

The chartreuse crystal stopped, a dim splash of yellow-green light on the dingy gray pavement. I hurdled a hand truck and grabbed at it. The crystal bounced off my nose and sailed after the train.

It tried three windows before it found an open one. Then it went in. And vanished.

Finlay was sitting on the baggage truck, looking as stupefied as I felt. He got up as I approached, and we went back to the gate. The guy who tended it was taking down a sign that said CHICAGO.

"Maybe he's getting off at Rochester."

"If we knew his name—"

"Maybe we could wire ahead—"

"We're not detectives," Finlay said.

"We haven't any authority to pull a man off a train. Uh-uh. Let's go find—ah—Mr. Upjohn."

I could think of nothing better to do. So we returned to the Pen & Pencil.

Mr. Upjohn was gone.

We sat down at our table and had another drink.

"It never happened," I said hopefully.

Finlay pointed to the tabletop. Etched there, in letters that shimmered like fire, were words.

Don't forget what I want. I'll make sure the work is published. Remember, two little piles of gray ash.

It was unsigned.

Presently the sentences faded out and vanished.

We had another drink. But we didn't feel it.

AN HOUR later we broke it up. Finlay had a picture to do, I had a deadline to meet. I went home, slipped a sheet of paper into my typewriter and started.

I typed: *Reader, I hate you.*

Which wasn't what I'd intended to say at all. I tried another sheet. And I typed the same thing.

I kept on doing it. That was all I could write, apparently. Post-hypnotic suggestion or something. But a superman—

No, I didn't believe it.

After a while I telephoned Finlay. "Hi," I said.

"Hi."

"My wife got a new hat."

"So did mine," he said. "What are you working on now?"

"Oh, a story. Just—a story. And you?"

"A picture."

"What—"

"A picture of a giant holding a spaceship," he told me. "Well? Can I guess what you're writing?"

"Yeah," I said. "You can guess. It's all I can write."

"And this is all I can draw," he said. "Do you suppose—"

"It's hypnosis, that's all. It's not impossible. We can get around it somehow or other."

"Sure we can," he said without conviction, and hung up.

A week later neither of us had got around it. My wastebasket was littered with crumpled sheets starting, *Reader, I hate you. I don't know what your name is—Joe or Mike or Forrest J—*

And Finlay said his wastebasket was in a similar condition, jammed with unfinished roughs of giants.

That's the way it was. Mr. Upjohn couldn't do this to us. But he kept on doing it.

We went up to see the editor of *Astonishing*. He listened, and looked at us in a marked manner.

"You don't believe us," we said.

"No," he said. "Not really."

"And you wouldn't buy the story or the picture?"

He looked at us again, broodingly. We went away.

"Editors," I said in the elevator, "have no imagination."

"It wasn't much to ask," Finlay said plaintively. "He might have tried to believe us. All I can sketch is that damn yellow giant with green eyes."

"And all I can write—"

"Maybe if we do what Mr. Upjohn wanted," Finlay suggested, "the hypnosis would wear off."

I said it was an idea, anyhow.

So we went home and got busy.

Halfway through the story my phone rang. It was the editor of *Astonishing*.

"Hey, Kuttner," he said. "I'm in a spot. I need a story in a hurry. Can you—"

"Certainly," I said, automatically. "I just yesterday thought of the greatest damn—"

Then I remembered. "Sorry," I said. "You know how it is with me. That story I'm working on—I have to finish it."

"That's the one I mean," he said. "Listen. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'm going to put it in the very next issue. *Super Science*, that is. It hits the stands before *Astonishing*."

"I'll finish it up right away," I promised. "Friday. Do you think you can read it soon?"

"Read it," His voice cracked. "Kuttner, I won't read *anything* till I read that story!"

And he hung up. I chased over to see Finlay.

He was putting the finishing strokes on a picture of a giant holding a spaceship, beaming.

"You got a phone call," I said.

"Yeah. He wanted a cover in a hurry. This cover. . . ."

We remembered the message on the table-top—Mr. Upjohn's cryptic remark that he'd make sure our work was published.

"Do you suppose Mr. Upjohn visited—"

I didn't finish. Too many strange things were going on. I'm a professional writer, not Faust. But I was beginning to feel like the Sorcerer's Apprentice.

But—well, there it is. This isn't orthodox. A cover picture always illustrates a scene in a story; it's got to. And a story has to have a plot. Don't ask me how this yarn and this cover ever got published. Ask Mr. Upjohn. He gets around. I've a hunch he got around to the editor.

NOW look—Joe or Mike or Forrest J or whoever you are. Get in touch with the editor. You buy this magazine, and this month it has a Finlay picture and a Kuttner story, so you'll be triply certain to buy it. After you've read this, you'll know the lowdown.

The chartreuse crystal seemed to like you. It found its way back into your pocket, I expect. But it isn't yours.

That's Mr. Upjohn's wife you're carrying around in your vest!

Mr. Upjohn is a superman. He's put the bee on us. It's worse than I'd thought, too. Unless you write Mr. Upjohn, care of the editor, Finlay and I will be in a spot. Two little piles of grayish ash...

But, as I say, it's much worse than we'd imagined. After finishing the cover picture, Finlay telephoned me.

"Look," he said, "I painted in the eyes last night—gave it the final touch. It's all done. I did what Upjohn wanted."

"I'll be through with the yarn tonight," I said.

"Let me know what happens."

"Why?"

His voice was bitter. "Because I started another picture. Because I tried to rough in a girl's figure against a starry background, and I couldn't do it. All I could sketch was a giant holding a spaceship."

"Again?"

"Yeah. Mr. Upjohn forgot to limit his hypnotism. I can't draw anything but that popeyed giant. Do I have to spend the rest of my life drawing that?"

"It's crazy," I said.

Finlay sucked in his breath. "You'll

find out. Wait'll you try to write another story. You won't be able to do it. Listen, put in a note to the little guy with the crystal. When he gets in touch with Mr. Upjohn, tell him to be sure to mention our fix. We did what Mr. Upjohn wanted. So have the little guy tell his superman to lift that hypnotic spell he put on us."

You got that?

Personally, I think Finlay's wrong. When I finish this yarn, I'm going to start another. And it won't begin, *Reader, I hate you.*

Well, that wraps it up. I'm through. Give Mr. Upjohn back his wife, and all will be forgiven. If you don't—

But you will. Eh?

Okay—that's all. Explicit. Thirty. The End. I'll pull this sheet out of my typewriter and get started on a yarn about a survivor from Lemuria who finds himself in a modern world. . . .

R *EADE*R, I hate you.
I don't know what your name is—
Joe or Mike or Forrest J—but I
refer to the little guy who—

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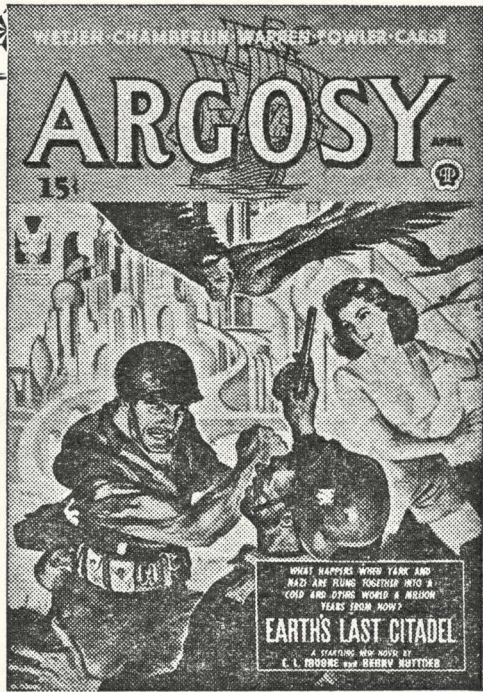
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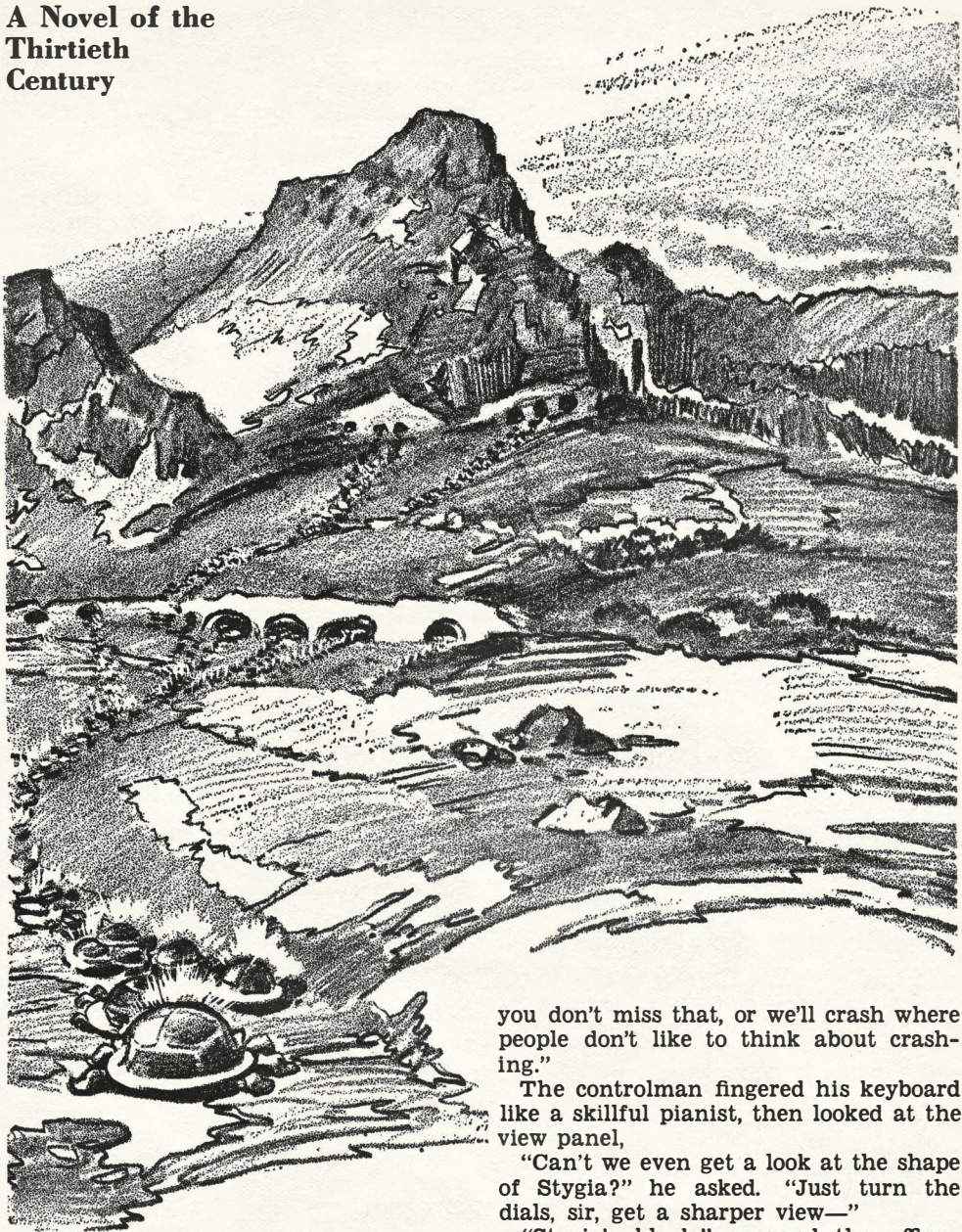
Beyond hope, beyond fear, they came to Inner-Worlds' last outpost—where the Legion of the Dark kept dreadful vigil against a foe whose touch meant death!

CHAPTER ONE

OUTPOST OF NOWHERE

FIRE streaked the velvet of space, fire from a rosette of rocket nozzles, to urge along the great, unwieldy oval that was the biggest and longest-range ship ever made by the Martio-Terrestrial League. Far astern glittered

A Novel of the Thirtieth Century



the Sun, a tiny but brilliant crumb of light. Up ahead appeared a brief spurt of crimson flame, then one of gold, like reflections of the rockets.

In the control room, the officer of the watch indicated those flame spurts on the view panel.

"Steer for them," he told the man at the control keys. "They're all you'll see for a while. Then a steadier, softer light pattern will cue us into the port. Mind

you don't miss that, or we'll crash where people don't like to think about crashing."

The controlman fingered his keyboard like a skillful pianist, then looked at the view panel,

"Can't we even get a look at the shape of Stygia?" he asked. "Just turn the dials, sir, get a sharper view—"

"Stygia's black," snapped the officer. "Why else do they call her Stygia? Haven't you read your cosmography, even if this is your first trip? If it wasn't for the volcanos, we might never have discovered Stygia."

"No loss," commented the controlman. He had been flying through space for nearly a year and a half, the last six months of it in the dark emptiness beyond Pluto, and he did not like it.

His superior laughed shortly and harshly, turned to the rear panel-way.

"There has to be some limit to the Solar System," he reminded, "and on that limit the League thinks it has to have a post, a garrison—and transport facilities. Cheer up! If it wasn't Stygia, it might be a planet farther out. Who knows? There may even be one farther out, still undiscovered." He left then, going into the aft compartment.

There sat his passengers, hard-eyed, bearded, sardonic. A dozen of the twenty had been at the age-old game of dice, the others lounging silently as spectators, but all looked up and waited for the officer's words.

"We're commencing to brake off," he announced. "That means pressure forward. Brace yourselves."

One man groaned. "Hours of that now."

"Days of it," corrected the officer. "Look here, we've done nearly six billion miles in eighteen months. Figure it out yourselves—around a hundred and fifteen miles a second, top speed. It'll take ten days to slow down to landing speed. I thought you'd be glad to know the voyage is fagging out."

The man who had groaned now snorted. "Sure the voyage is nearly over. And what's our port? Stygia—the Legion of the Dark, the toughest and most useless government post in the System! Who'd take it except those who can't refuse it, jailbirds and worse?" He got up from where he knelt among the dicers. He was big and rawboned, and his gray-shot brown beard hung to the end of his breastbone. "Thanks for telling us about braking off, mister. But don't congratulate us on where we're going to land. We know how sweet a spot that is, don't we, men?"

There was a chorus of yells and curses to support the speaker. He and his comrades were destined for the Legion of the Dark.

They were the offscourings and misfits and criminals from the Inner Planets, rounded up and organized for duty upon Stygia, the habitable planet beyond Pluto which must be subjugated to fulfill the conquering destiny of Inner-World civilization.

"When you're in the Legion, you'll learn respect for your superiors," said the officer. Brown-beard grinned without mirth.

"I'm not in yet. So why respect you?" He took a step nearer. "Why respect you?" he repeated.

The officer flinched back, despite him-

self, and one or two watchers laughed.

At that moment another hairy recruit slid out of the group of onlookers and up to the pair. He was big and heavily-built, seemingly too large to be as quiet and swift and smooth in his movements.

"No trouble," he bade softly, and put his hand on the malcontent's angular shoulder.

He appeared to exert no pressure at all, yet Brown-beard's whole body stiffened and vibrated. The ghost of a whimper came from hairy lips. Then: "Don't—I didn't mean—"

"All right." The big hand relaxed and moved from the shoulder. Crestfallen and quiet, Brown-beard slunk away.

The officer, who had watched with a certain critical interest, spoke again: "Suit yourselves about how you feel. I didn't enlist you for the Legion of the Dark, and I'm really sorry for you. All I came here for was to inform you of the brake-off. Get set for it."

HE TURNED on his heel, sensing a few sullen glares but no other hostility. As he moved toward the door to the control room, he passed near the big man who had sided with him.

"Come here," he said. He looked at the fellow's stalwart limbs, his black beard of youth, his eyes bright and pained and old-seeming. The fellow wore elascoid overalls like the others, but they were unusually clean and neat.

"Why did you help me?" he asked.

The big man made a deprecatory gesture. "Because I wanted no trouble. I joined the Legion very gratefully. If there was a scene or violence, the whole bunch of us might have been punished."

The officer nodded. "You're master of a very useful science, aren't you—I mean, the way you handled that customer?"

"Handled him?" repeated the giant in his soft voice.

"Just a touch of a nerve. It happens," said the officer, "that once or twice I've seen exhibitions of nerve-wrestling. Only they aren't to be seen often—because the only men who know how to do it are high—very high—officials in the Martio-Terrestrial League."

"You're a high official and know the science?" That was almost a challenge.

The officer shook his head. "No, I said I'd only seen it done. Well, thanks again."

He moved to go, but the big man spoke quick. "I have a favor to ask, sir."

"Favor?" echoed the officer. "What?"

"Message home. Message back to Earth."

The officer shook his head. "That's not regulation. No scrap of writing can be taken from Stygia without the knowledge and approval of the commandant."

"This can be spoken. And you'll be paid well for taking it. You'll land in St. Louis, the World capitol? Find a—a lady named Naomi Tennant."

"Naomi Tennant. I've heard that name."

"Yes," nodded the big recruit. "Daughter of Spaceways' chief engineer. Tell her that you saw me and that I was saying nothing."

The officer turned the words in his mind. "Whom shall I say I saw?"

The bearded face smiled slightly. "That means you'll carry the message? I give no name, sir. Only tell what I looked like, that I was a recruit of the Legion. Nothing more."

"Mmm. I'll see."

The officer walked back to the control room. The forward rockets were blooming, and pressure came from the bow of the craft, so that he braced himself against it.

"Funny types among those rookies," he commented to the man at the controls, who nodded in agreement.

"Isn't the Legion of the Dark made up of funny types, sir? I hope, for their own sakes, they stay funny. There's precious little to laugh at where they're going."

SLOWLY, carefully, the ship descended on a vast, gray disc in the gloom, like a single small bean set grudgingly on a large round plate. Even so far from the sun, there was light here, dim, soft dusk. The door opened, and a harsh, guttural voice spoke:

"Rrecruits! Turrrn out immediately!"

They poured out through the lock-panel, twenty-six men, all Terrestrial and all rough-looking.

"Sstand in a line!" bade the commanding voice. "Quickly! Learn to obey!"

The owner of the voice made a dull glimmer in the twilight. He wore a metalized uniform of high-colored tunic, breeches and boots, and stood erect like a Terrestrial. But even in a darker spot he would be recognizable as a Martian.

His shapeless bladder-body was corseted into something like a firm torso, his two lower tentacles braced and shaped to act as legs. His head, tufted

with petal-like tags of tissue that made him look like a walking dandelion, was cocked back arrogantly. In the breathing hole of that head was lodged an artificial larynx, with which he achieved spoken words. His upper tentacles, clad in sleeves and set akimbo like arms, bore the ancient triple chevron of a sergeant.

The newcomers lined up obediently. The air of this new world was heavy and still, and each man felt oppressed and leaden by more gravity that he had known at home. The Martian sergeant strutted along the front of the formation, with a whispering clink of brace-joints.

"Rrrr . . . yes. A typical group from the gutters of the Innerr Planetts! Unkempt, sullen, sstupid!" The artificial voice slurred and quivered. "The whole of you would not make a ssmut on the uniform of a trrue Legionarry!"

"I don't like that," growled the gaunt Brown-beard who had voiced complaints aboard the ship.

The sergeant paused in front of him. "Yourr name?"

"Scoban. Door Scoban."

The petalled head wagged negation. "No. Yourr name iss Private Sscoban! Ssay it."

The brown beard quivered angrily. "Private Scoban, sir."

"Not sirr to a sserrgeant—only obedient action and ssilence."

The Martian whistled in his larynx, and two more men in metallized fabric came smartly up behind him.

"Arresst Prriate Sscoban!"

The men marched Brown-beard away, and the sergeant continued to the others: "You arre Legionarries now. Be warnned—punissment befallss those who whine orr questtion or arre tarryd in obeying orrderrrs. We arre prroud to be dissciplined ssoldierrrs, with the harrdesst sservice of all the Ssysstem to perrform. Any otherr complaintss?"

There were none.

The sergeant rasped an order: "Rright face! Forrwardd marrch! Follow me!"

The recruits obediently trailed after him, dragging their feet like iron shackles after his briskly tramping boot heels. They could see, with eyes growing accustomed to the dimness, that the gray disc on which they stood was a great metal landing stage of some sort, with here and there little kiosks leading to stages below. Around the edge of the round expanse showed only dark—sooty, mysterious dark. One or two men thought

they heard noises somewhere out beyond.

The Martian led them to one of the kiosks and down a flight of stairs, then along a corridor to a square chamber like a school room.

"Sit," he ordered, and they sat on hard benches, their eyes fixed on the man at the desk before them.

HE WAS of middle-age, no more than average height, and as slender as a boy. His pale hair was cropped close above a pale face with lean jaw and penetrating eyes. On his uniform tunic were golden galoons of rank.

He waited for the recruits to subside, then spoke. "I am your commanding officer. My name is Barlund, and my rank is that of colonel. As directed by the regulations of the service in which I am included, I shall speak briefly of what your duties and expectations may be.

"This, the planet Stygia, is the outermost known world of the Solar System. It is six billion miles from the central sun, and has been certified as habitable. Because of its habitability, the government of the Martio-Terrestrial League, which took possession here seven years ago, is determined to explore, estimate and develop all possible resources and characteristics.

"Stygia is nineteen thousand miles in diameter, with a gravitational pull approximately twice that of Earth. Central fires, which break out in volcanoes, keep the surface warm. Various forms of life, approximating both animal and vegetable, are to be found here. To learn more about these forms of life is our task."

He paused and studied his audience. When he spoke again, it was with soldierly harshness.

"This garrison of the Martio-Terrestrial League, manned by the Legion of the Dark, is located upon the highest peak of all Stygia, a dome-shaped mountain some thirty-six thousand feet above Stygia's sea level. Air is more breathable here, and light more adequate. Also, the inhabitants of Stygia find it harder to attack us here, and defenses have been perfected to give us some safety.

"Beyond this, your instructors will guide you. Sergeant Kzak, you may—" Colonel Barlund broke off and looked at a note on his desk. "Wait. Is there a recruit by the name of Farr?"

"Here, sir." It was the big man who had asked a favor of the watch officer aboard the ship.

"Remain. The rest of you accompany Sergeant Kzak."

The Martian gave orders and led his charges away. Colonel Barlund was left alone, facing the huge recruit who had answered to the name of Farr.

"WHY DO you lie?" demanded the colonel at once.

The man called Farr widened his wise-looking eyes a trifle.

"Your name isn't Farr. You're from high up, and you've no business in this kind of mess. Admit that."

All this was said without heat. Farr narrowed his eyes again.

"I've enlisted as Farr, William Farr. I came to be a soldier in the Legion of the Dark. You need men, I think, sir."

"All of which doesn't answer my charge." Colonel Barlund looked at his paper again. "Private Farr—since you stick to that—we don't like mysteries here. The planet of Stygia is mystery enough, without men like you adding to it. Ordinarily I'd let a man give a false name if he pleased—we're far out of range of census bureaus and birth certificates and such. But you're not ordinary. You were important back home. Important men don't lose themselves in the Legion of the Dark."

"I'm sorry, sir." Farr really looked it. "I have nothing to say."

"I wonder if you'll stick to that after you've read this."

The colonel held out the paper. Farr took it and read, frowning.

Commandant,
Garrison of Stygia:

A recruit who uses the name of William Farr is being sent to you by the ship on which this message is being mailed. He is more than he seems to be. He has left an important station among the Inner Worlds, through no fault of his own, and can be of great aid to his former associates. Please take what action you find convenient to return him.

Naomi Tennant,
Board of Directors,
Spaceways, Inc.

Farr clicked his tongue absently, and muttered something like: "Must she?"

He handed the paper back. "Not much for you to work on, eh, sir?" he inquired, as if speaking to an equal, and, as to an equal, the colonel dolefully nodded.

"If you won't help further, go and join the others," he said. "But Naomi Tennant is important back home, almost as im-

portant as her father, and you should be willing to oblige her."

"Perhaps I've already done so." Farr rose and saluted. "I have your permission to go?"

He hurried, striving hard against the double gravity of Stygia, to overtake the recruits led by Sergeant Kzak.

The Martian, slurring orders, took them to a supply depot, where a variety of equipment was served out. First, a metallized uniform, which bore within its fabric the network of power-threads that cut the gravity pull in half and made active life possible; boots and belts, the latter furnished with sheaths and pouches for a variety of instruments; weapons—MS-ray throwers, electro-automatic rifles and ammunition carriers; bedding, toilet articles and many other items.

"Sstrip!" commanded the slurring voice of Kzak. "Sstrip—and sshave. Do not put the honored uniform of the Legion upon bodies that are not clean and worthy!"

At his insistence, beards were sheared and lathered, then scraped away. One or two men glanced at William Farr as he came from behind his hairy mask.

"Look, big one, haven't I seen you before?" hailed one.

"Before what?" quibbled Farr with a grin.

"Were you in teleradio shows?"

"I've never been anywhere." Farr finished throwing off his overall. He got into the shining tunic and breeches and boots of the Legion, and made an upstanding figure in them. Kzak strolled toward him.

"You sshape up well. Have you had pprevious military experrience? If so, you might get ppromotion."

"Nothing of that sort," replied Farr. "I'm only—"

A strident buzzing suddenly drowned out the rest of his words.

The recruits gaped, wonderingly. Only Kzak and the three supply-room attendants moved to action of an intelligent sort.

"Alarrm! To posstss!" bawled the Martian, and hurried out. The attendants, three froglike Venusians and a wiry little Terrestrial, followed.

Left alone, the recruits chattered and inquired, with none to answer their mystified questions—save the man who had just disclaimed any military knowl- edge.

"Attention, you men!" suddenly thundered William Farr, and all voices hushed, all eyes turned to him.

"That buzzer was the signal of a serious emergency," Farr was saying. "Attack of some kind from below, I judge . . . Well, what are you waiting for? Get into those uniforms; they'll cut the gravity so that you can move. Any of you know how to use ray-throwers and automatics? All right, grab the weapons. Form up in columns of twos!"

"Who made you an officer?" demanded the man nearest him, glaring with truculent eyes.

"Do as you're told," bade Farr, but the other shook his head. He was the angular, malcontent Scoban, who had been arrested, reprimanded and restored to duty.

"We're raw recruits. If you push us into some kind of fight, it'll be fatal! I don't recognize your right to give orders."

Farr sighed, as if in doleful acceptance of an unpleasant duty, and stepped across to Scoban. As once before, he put out a quick, knowing hand. Scoban tried to dodge, but too late. Farr's hand hooked behind Scoban's scruff; Farr's other thumb prodded scientifically at Scoban's solar plexus. The man collapsed limply, almost restfully, as if under anesthetic. Farr caught him as he fell and tumbled him into a corner.

"Column of twos," he commanded the others again, and they fell in quickly, carrying their weapons with various degrees of knowingness. "Follow me."

HE LED them forth into a corridor they had not known. He paused for only a moment. His eyes caught a glimmer of blue and yellow lights up ahead.

"Guardhouse," he said under his breath, and strode toward it, his followers obediently keeping at his heels.

The lights proved to be a signal cluster above a barred door. Farr pointed a pistol-form MS-ray thrower at the lock and with a single pencil-thin spurt of cruel white light slapped the door open. He looked inside.

"Who's there?" he demanded. "Senior man, step out."

A chunky prisoner came into view. His sleeves showed where a sergeant's stripes had been removed.

"I was busted down from—" he began.

"Come along," cut in Farr. "Know what that signal means?"

"Attack on all hands," said the ex-sergeant.

"Lead us to the nearest point of action," Farr directed, and the prisoner obediently tramped away up the corridor.

Farr, letting his new subordinate lead, fell back to the flank of his double column.

"You men who know guns and rays, instruct those who don't," he crisped out. "Any other prisoners coming from the guardhouse? Four, I see. All right, men. You're experienced soldiers. I'm making you my lieutenants. Divide these rookies among you into four squads. The sergeant commands under me."

The ex-sergeant guided the group to a great lift. At Farr's nod, all boarded and the sergeant touched a button. They began to descend with increasing speed. Suddenly the car halted. A new corridor opened before them. At its end rose a strange, confused medley of sound—hissing, buzzing, yelping, the murmur of voices.

"Wh-what's that?" quavered a young recruit, his hands shakily balancing weapons he hardly knew how to use.

Farr smiled upon him, in almost fatherly fashion. "That," he replied, "is a battle. And it's very, very close indeed—perhaps dangerously close. You acting lieutenants, form the men for defense firing. Follow me."

ON AN UPPER crag of the fortified mountain was a tiny metal cupola from which Colonel Barlund watched, as well as the gloom would let him, the assault on his position. He could make out the great curved slope beneath him, the ramparted mouths of caves where his troops were stationed, the pale, brief flashes of gunfire and ray action, the glowing trajectories of roving bombs from radio-propulsion nozzles. Too, he could make out ugly, livid glow-shapes beneath—a vast field of rotten-seeming radiance, soft and quivering, like a phosphorescent bed of ooze in an ocean depth.

"There they are," he groaned, "more of 'em than anyone ever saw before—must be a kind of alliance of all types against us."

"It's the coming of the ship," suggested a slender captain behind him. "They almost always made a token attack when a ship came, particularly if they wanted to grab it. No attack the last three landings; they were gathering strength for this one. Hitting all sides at once."

"And there aren't enough of us to turn them back all around the defense," groaned another subordinate.

"Never mind swan songs until it's time to sing," Barlund snubbed him. He turned to a microphone. "Attention, all defense positions! Concentrate fire on thickest glow-fields that indicate largest bodies of enemy . . . Reserve forces, bring up additional supplies of ammunition—"

A courier scampered in breathlessly. "Colonel Barlund, sir, there's been a break at the guardhouse! Door rayed open; every prisoner gone!"

"See to that emergency," Barlund growled at the officer who had mourned inadequacy of defense personnel. His eyes were fixed on a segment of the fortifications below, where no evidence of fire could be seen. He cursed feelingly.

"Why aren't they defending there?" he demanded of the universe at large. "Look, not a shot, not a ray, not a bomb! And the attack is concentrating there. Two big entries to our position could be rushed! Once the enemy gets in—"

In the gloomy depths below showed a great mass of softly glowing light that seemed to crawl like sentient lava up the slope toward the undefended position. Barlund set his teeth, tried to think of an intelligent order to give—without success. Then. . . .

The two silent cave-mouths burst into live flame.

A sustained, smashing salvo of electro-automatic pellets sprayed downward, point-blank, at the advancing stream of menace. Bombs too sprang into the thick of the target. Rays bloomed into being and played with deadly purpose. Caught fair and unwarned, the advancing mass seemed to explode and break up, like mercury before a prodding finger. Within seconds it was flowing downhill again—what was left of it.

Barlund cursed again, but with exultant relief.

"That's success!" he bawled. "Look, the whole attack's going to slack off. Man, what slaughter we must have pulled off! Who was in command there, Renald? Get him on the speaking system!"

A subordinate hurried to obey, and Barlund grabbed the microphone.

"Captain Renald? Colonel Barlund speaking. Congratulations—"

"Thanks, but it wasn't my doing, sir," came the voice of Captain Renald. "Your man, Farr, with the recruits, took over as you told him, and—"

"Farr took over as I told him?" broke in Barlund. "I told him nothing!"

"But he said you'd sent him with special orders to decoy a strong force of the enemy almost to our defenses. And it worked splendidly, sir!"

Barlund cursed yet again. "Captain Renald, take over there again. Tell your command to hold fire, but stand ready for any other indication of danger. And tell two men to arrest that troublemaker, Farr, and bring him to me."

CHAPTER TWO

DEATH PATROL

A GAIN, in the office of the commandant, Colonel Barlund and Private William Farr faced each other. This time they were not alone. Two armed soldiers of the Legion guarded Farr, and to one side, with writing materials, sat Sergeant Kzak as recorder.

"Private Farr," said the colonel, "I have a official report that you led the recruits into battle, assuming command of a post from Captain Renald, and giving commands that led to resistance of the enemy."

"You make it sound like an accusation, sir," responded Farr.

"It is three accusations. You have violated three general orders that govern this post—the first in bringing danger to men not properly trained; the second in falsely using my supposed authority to your own ends; the third in assuming command when you were not qualified or commissioned to do so."

Farr bowed, urbanely and almost grandly. "I did all three. It seemed that the position was in grave danger. I saw a chance to save it, and did so."

"You did?" said Colonel Barlund. "How?"

"The men I had organized were not soldiers nor marksmen. Yet I felt that they were determined, and might do something if they got a chance to send point-blank volleys. Then, acting as you say I did, I superseded the officer in command and held all fire until I had drawn a great attacking force forward—"

"How did you manage that?" the colonel asked.

Farr smiled wispily. "I climbed out of the defenses and down the slope. The air was thick, and I could not see far into the dark. But I saw the attackers—stubby, many-legged, phosphorescent.

And they saw me, or sensed me. I retreated, and they followed me right into the trap."

"A fourth violation," summed up the commandant. "No member of this garrison shall venture out of the defenses except on order."

"I caused a retreat of the enemy," reminded Farr.

The pale face of Barlund grew paler still.

"Stop that shadow-boxing!" he snarled. "You're a prisoner, not an instructor! You had a chance, not more than a few hours ago, to tell the truth about yourself. Now, since you're setting yourself up as a romantic hero—" He broke off for a moment, then said, "Sergeant Kzak!"

"Ssirr!"

"Patrol tonight. In fact, as soon as you can equip a reconnaissance party."

"Yess, ssirr. I will take charge?"

"Of course. And this man, Private Farr, goes with you—as *point*."

"Yess, ssirr." Kzak rose. "Come with me, Farrr."

The prisoner's smile was positively sunny.

ON THE LOWER surfaces of Stygia, dark and quiet and oppressive as a sea bottom, an army lay encamped in the eternal siege of the Legion's mountain fortress.

Seldom had the explorers from sunward ever seen the Stygians clearly; those who did see them were still more seldom apt to live and tell of the sight. The natives of the dark, warm world were designed by nature for life in an environment characterized by strong gravitational pull, limited light, high air pressure. They were built heavy and low to the ground, on many appendages which served for legs—some had six, some had eight. The body thus supported on stumpy limbs was dome-shaped and massive, like a turtle's back. Its outer rind, tougher than leather, emitted a glow. In most specimens this phosphorescence was a sickly white, like the luster of pearls in a shadowed pool. Others gave off blue, pink or prismatic tinges. These of the colored lights were generally bigger and more forthright of movement, as befitted leaders of a people.

The Stygians sprouted tentacles all around the lower edge of their dome-bodies, tentacles as cunning and pliable as fingers, able to stretch and twine and handle. These tentacles plied the various

strange weapons devised by Stygian science, did work and manufacture, and also achieved the vibrational sounds that constituted the articulate language of the race.

"How many dead?" One of the pink-lighted chiefs now asked a council of his fellows behind the lines.

"Very many," contributed another, who had received a report from the recent disastrous battle. "Hundreds, we think. They died almost at the moment of reaching that doorway to the fortress of the Sky-Devils."

"And of the bodies?"

"A few were saved."

"I don't like that!" broke in a strident vibration from the senior commander, a dome fully ten feet across and seven high, more than half again the size of his largest associate. "The explosions and fires of the Sky-Devil weapons not only wipe out our best and bravest, but also the armor and equipment with which we fit them for attack in those upper thin reaches of atmosphere. Salvage what can be salvaged. Fit out a new shock force—for we are going to attack again."

"Again? But the vessel of the Sky-Devils has departed into the Upper Mysteries." That was the pink-glowing chief, who also had reports. "Our observers watched it depart, just after the repulsing of our attack."

"No matter. Another has come."

"So soon?" came the incredulous vibration of several.

"Yes, almost immediately after the departure of the first. And—" the biggest commander glowed more brightly in a greenish tinge, as if to display triumph foreordained—"this time we may seize that vessel."

There was much excitement all around. All Stygians had hoped from the beginning of the century-long war with invading Sky-Devils to take one of the strange flying machines that apparently brought them from afar. Such a device, captured and investigated, might well answer many riddles—whence the Sky-Devils came; what they wanted on this world which did not want them; how they lived in so rarefied an atmosphere; how best to conquer and destroy them.

"Therefore," finished the chief of the chiefs, "bring forth all the armor, the pressure-bestowers, the weapons of assault. We shall hold nothing back to win straight to the heart of the Sky-Devil

defenses. Our world and people shall be free by this time tomorrow."

SIX LEGIONARIES, in a small supply room, got into special equipment. The commander of the party, Sergeant Kzak, gave directions.

"Do not dissdain thiss armorr," he urged, as one or two grimaced over swaddlings of fabric and metal mountings similar to space-overalls. "It will fence off ssome of the prresssure in the lower altitudess."

Two of the six were Venusians, frog-like and goggling, with booming voices that Kzak did not like.

"The pressure won't be worse than at home on Venus," one protested. "Why must we go armored?"

"Therre arre worrsse things than the atmospherre down therre," replied Kzak crytically. "Do ass you arre told. Full equipment."

Private William Farr had had difficulty finding armor to fit his mighty body. He poised a spherical helmet of glassite between big gloved hands and grinned above it at Kzak.

"I understand that we know very little about the lower surfaces of Stygia," he said. "Tunneling down has failed, because the mineral construction of this hill is so tough and hard. And low-swooping aircraft with searchlights get blasted to bits by the inhabitants. Well, then, why not—"

"Ssilence!" bawled Kzak, almost as loud as a Venusian. "Arre you not aware of yourr place in thiss patrol?"

"Oh, perfectly. I'm to be killed."

The others—the Venusians, the two additional Terrestrial soldiers, and Kzak—all fell silent, as if embarrassed by the answer.

Farr went on, quite genially, "I'm designated as the point, the leading individual in the patrol. I'll be the closest and first to danger. From what I know about such attempts as the present one, and from what I hear about Stygia, the chance of a reconnaissance patrol returning is no more than fair. The position of point man is dangerous, even to a seasoned veteran of such patrols. It stands to the reason of such persons as Colonel Barlund, and of yourself, Sergeant Kzak, that my own chance of survival is almost negligible."

"You rreasson too clearlly," was the sergeant's surly rejoinder.

"Granted." Farr bowed. "Yet I spoke

only for you and the colonel. Speaking now for myself, I expect to survive and to bring back much matter of value."

He put on his helmet. The others did likewise.

Kzak spoke by radio: "Follow me to this elevator. Now down . . . Sso. This is almost the lowest level of our excavations. Follow me furtherr."

They reached a small chamber like a lock panel of a ship. It was pitch dark and guarded by two heavily armed Martians, whose native sensory equipment made light unnecessary.

Kzak presented written orders, and the guards opened a port, carefully hidden from outside. The party emerged.

"No lightss," warned Kzak at once. "Not until we pierce the enemy lines—if we do. Rrange yourrsself quickly. The Venusians take flank positions. You, ssoldierr, at the rear. If we arre ssurrprissed, sstay out of any fight. One of uss musst rreturn if possible. Prri-vate Farr, twenty paces in advance."

Farr chuckled into his helmet-microphone. "Alone, with glory fluttering over me," he half chanted. "Alone, as Lucifer at war with heaven."

"What was that?"

"A speech credited to an ancient poet named Cyrano de Bergerac. You wouldn't understand, Sergeant. Shall we move out?"

It was as though he, not Kzak, gave the order. The group, ranged like an open diamond, began to steal down-slope toward the distant flecks of light that marked the ranks of beleaguering Stygians.

IF WILLIAM FARR'S helmeted ears did not burn as he moved cautiously downward in the dark, it was not for want of being talked about.

Colonel Barlund was entertaining three newcomers in his headquarters in the upper reaches of the fortress, but his manner was not that of a carefree host. He stood erect and stiff, as was his wont when nonplussed, and his eyes traveled from one to another of his visitors.

Well might a simple colonel of an outer garrison gaze in awe. Before him were three of the seven chief councillors of the Martio-Terrestrial League.

"I offer this again, with all respect," the colonel ventured once more. "He came to me as a recruit, under a false name, denying even that he knew anything about command or military life.

I treated him as just a common man."

"You tell us, then, that common men are sent by you—untrained and unwarned—into certain death." Those words were spoken by a woman, handsome but austere.

Her name was Naomi Tennant, and she was the newest-chosen member of the League Council. Tall and noble of figure, she looked rather like the statue of an ancient goddess with her braided brown hair and her gracefully draped robe of office. Her eyes were green and biting as they fixed on the colonel.

"I wrote you a note, on the very eve of my election," she reminded. "I pointed out that the man known as William Farr was someone to merit special treatment."

"He put me off with—evasions," miserably pleaded Colonel Barlund. "He even badgered me, by disobedience, into decreeing this punishment—"

Naomi Tennant almost snarled, if a regal beauty is able to snarl. One of her companions, a Martian Councillor in a dark maroon robe with gold figurings, mimicked Terrestrial laughter in his artificial voice-box. His flowery head wagged and nodded.

"Naomi is desservedly upset," he said "Sshe hopes to marry her fellow-Councillorr, the man you know as William Farr."

"He's a League Councillor, then," Barlund fairly groaned. One hand clawed shakily at his disordered hair. Matters were getting worse all the time.

"Who else would we come after—all this way, in person, in a special ship?" demanded the third visitor, a booming, gorgeously clad Venusian. He was Gmapul, richest and most capable of his race, and his ordinarily deafening voice now rang with two-fold volume in his earnestness. "William Farr is in reality William Farnol Drake, second senior of the Council—and, as you may know, the Earth's foremost aristocrat."

"For thirty generations of scientific supervision, the Drakes have been bred and trained for leadership," put in Naomi Tennant, "in order that the last and greatest of them should be tossed away like a nutshell by a stupid military bully."

Barlund wished that he might faint. But colonels are not chosen from among fainting men.

He made a last appeal. "I've heard of William Farnol Drake—at twenty-six a Councillor, at twenty-eight a Chief Coun-

collor, called the Ultimate Specimen and all that. But why, *why* did he come here, and on the terms he did?"

"Oh," said the Martian, still with his imitation laugh near the top, "I can tell that. I fear the leasst that Drrake will perrissh. He iss not the perrisshing ssoort. But listten:

"Frrom the firrsst, we have held back frrom full conquesst of Sstygia. You have known ssomething of that, Colonel Barrlund, for orrderrss have been to keep yourr footing, no more."

"Right," agreed Barlund, "though I never knew why."

"Therre wass no occassion to tell you, but now you sshall hearr. Claimss have been clouded ass to which worrld hass chief rright to Sstygia—Earrth, Marrss or Venuss."

True enough, reflected Barlund. Early explorations and discoveries were mixed up, and reports differed.

The Martian continued: "Only within the rrecent ssessions of the Council wass a decision rreached. It wass decreed that a new government be esstablished, mandated and watched overr by all governmentss now in the League, to be sset at independence when considered worrthy. And Drrake assked forr full rreporrtss from Sstygia." A tentacle flourished. "He wass not ssatisfissed."

"What reports could we give?" asked Barlund plaintively. "We've been only lightly garrisoned and equipped, to keep no more than our footing, as you said. What you tell me, sir, makes it plain that we weren't supposed to dig too far into things. But we couldn't be expected to make full reports, could we?"

"Perrhapss not. Drrake did not find fault. He decided to come and ssee for himself."

"The idiot," contributed Naomi Tennant, in a soft contralto voice that caressed the word.

"It's Drake's way of doing things," put in the Venusian Gmapul. "He told me half of what he intended. He knew that if he came here as himself, he'd be sheltered and shielded despite himself. And he wanted first-hand information. So—"

"So he came as a recruit," said Barlund. "But why didn't he lead a big, well-equipped army with him, to complete the conquest of Stygia? That would make sense."

"What he iss doing now makess ssensse, orr I missjudge my frriend Drrake," assured the Martian.

Barlund felt a relaxation of the accusing tension around him. "If it's your will," he said briskly, "I'll fit out all my available troops as a party to go fetch him back. I hope—" he fought to keep his voice from shaking—"that it isn't too late. I'll go myself, but—"

"Wait," said Naomi Tennant. "He came here in person, for some scheme of his own. He went out there in person, trusting his own strength. And we—we followed him this distance in person, once I told you others that I'd learned where he went and that I'd sent a message about him."

"Well?" prompted Gmapul, with a froggy grin.

"Well," finished Naomi Tennant, "why do we wait? Aren't we Councillors? Leave Colonel Barlund to run his garrison. I daresay it needs him badly. Let's take a guide and go after him—the three of us in person still!"

CHAPTER THREE

A COUNCELLOR COMMANDS

KZAK, like most sergeants, had very little scruple and very much ambition. He had ventured out of the fortress on six previous patrols, and had brought back much of the limited information headquarters had about the lower altitudes of Stygia. Yet not once had he penetrated beyond the besieging lines into the dark, strangely wooded plains that lay around the mountain.

His present patrol was exceptionally well equipped. Each armored man had shut in with his body a supply of food and drink, a radio and electrical units to power his tools and weapons. Each was armed with electro-automatic rifle and pistol, MS-ray thrower and grenades. Kzak, in addition, had a radio-control device whereby any grenades thrown into the air could be directed and propelled.

It would be sad, thought Kzak inside his snug helmet, if they could not penetrate the enemy positions, investigate beyond, and get back—at least some of them. He, Kzak, was a Martian. He needed no lights as Terrestrials and Venusians did, and as Stygians evidently must, for they gave off a glow with their bodies. Casualties in his command would impress Colonel Barlund. A long trip, several adventures and valuable information—yes, and the destruction of this troublesome recruit, Farr. He, Kzak,

would gain commendation, perhaps promotion.

"Attention!" he said into the microphone which would carry his voice to all hands. "I sense a trail downhill at this point. Do not take it. The Stygians will undoubtedly guard its lower end. Pull to the right, and down."

Obediently the men veered from the smoother path. Farr, up ahead, was making clever progress in the gloom, almost as well as a Martian. The descent continued in silence, gropingly over rough rocks and once or twice dangerously down slides and past ledges. The glow of the Stygians grieved below.

"Furtherr right," bade Kzak. "They are concentrated too thickly immediately to our front. We must find a weak point."

Again they shifted their direction. Minutes passed.

Suddenly Farr, up ahead, spoke into his own mike: "Down, all. Movement just ahead."

Putting action to word, Farr dropped behind a little nubbin of rock. His automatic rifle came handily to the fore. The others assumed prone positions, weapons at the ready. Kzak waited, then wormed cautiously forward at full length until he came close to Farr.

"What is it?" he demanded.

For answer, Farr aimed his piece. Kzak came closer still, to where he could observe its sighting.

The rifle had a telescopic sight, with beyond-spectrum attachments that made light unnecessary. Thus Farr could see what it aimed at as well as Kzak. He was covering a point beyond and below, at perhaps eight hundred Earth yards distance.

There, indeed, were the lines and groups of the Stygians, like glowing, ambulant washtubs. But in their center was a dark ditch, full of shadows, extending at right angles to the line of defenses.

"Well?" prompted Kzak.

"That's a deep cut," replied Farr. "And no Stygians in it—or we'd see their glow. Some of us might sneak along it, and through."

"They are too close," clipped out the sergeant, glad of a chance to snub Farr. "We would be trapped."

"Not if somebody drew the attention of that part of the Stygians."

"And who dares?"

"I dare. Shall I show you?"

WITHOUT waiting for orders, Farr scrambled off at an angle, taking advantage of some swarthy-seeming, flesh-leaved bushes for cover.

Kzak watched him go, half started to call him back. Then he reconsidered. Let the too-wise Terrestrial be a decoy—and perish at the job. Kzak might profit by the very device indicated. . . .

He waited, and he had not long to wait. The stuffy air echoed suddenly to the futile-sounding *sput* of an electro-automatic pellet. Down among the Stygians a softly shining dome suddenly flamed as the thermal particle exploded within its vitals. The creature collapsed at the very lip of the little ravine.

The others seemed to grow tense and silent, as if searching for the source of that attack. Then they found it. Several of them moved away from their position.

From the strange sachels they wore, their tentacles drew forth weapons—tubes that spit fiery little arrows. A flight of these fell around a clump of the bushes halfway between Kzak and the Stygian lines. There was a blazing of light as the vegetation took fire from the projectiles. A red radiance came into being, and in its light was defined a big human figure in armor, poising a rifle. From that rifle came another *sput*, and another Stygian collapsed, its glow pointed up by its death agony.

Swift and knowing for all their clumsy seeming, Stygians moved toward the enemy. The crack went for the moment unguarded.

"Come, you others!" said Kzak at once, and led a rush downhill.

He sensed the beginning of the crack, and made straight for it. Meanwhile, the diversion offered by Farr went on.

The electro-automatic spoke again and yet again. These times it missed, but though fire-arrows pierced the big man's coverall, he did not fall or flinch. His rifle fired, missing once more. Stygians made a concerted rush. Kzak saw that much and then dropped into the shelter of the fissure. His men kept close at his heels.

Downward, along the bottom of the crack, they ran swiftly and silently. A few steps took them to a point many feet below the level of the battle, but they could hear the *sput-sput* of Farr's rifle, the heavy laboring of Stygians. Kzak was able to decide that he was past the outlying positions of the enemy, and after a final scamper he drew his subor-

dinates close. At his command they formed a pyramid, one on the shoulders of another. Kzak swarmed to the top, and looked out.

It was dark here. He and his men were indeed behind the front lines of Stygians. He climbed forth, and the others with him. To right and left he could make out glowing groups of adversaries, but none at his immediate front.

"Come!" he commanded, and led the way outward. Not far from here would be the plains.

Had the patrol looked backward with eyes sharp enough, they would have seen the end of the Stygian rush.

Half a dozen laboring hulks, like wise and fierce jelly-fish, gained the point where the armored figure seemed to crouch. Clutching tentacles shot out to make a capture—and drew back, non-plussed.

The enemy was an empty overall, draped on a bush. The rifle had been propped to that empty costume's shoulder, and its electro-automatic firing mechanism had been hastily adjusted to the remote control of the radio Farr carried, in order to fire aimlessly but convincingly. Farr himself was nowhere to be seen.

WILLIAM FARNOL DRAKE, Senior Councillor of the Martio-Terrestrial League, Director of Interplanetary Relations, Honorary Corps Commander of the Terrestrial Army, Honorary Vice-Admiral of the Martio-Terrestrial Space Navy and private soldier of the Legion of the Dark, was trotting away into the dimness.

He had left his armor behind, for a decoy, but he still wore the metalloïd uniform that housed gravity neutralizers and the glassite helmet that would keep his bronchial apparatus from too great a punishment from the thick atmosphere. The radio he carried was damaged by too-hasty improvising for remote control firing of the rifle. As he went, he repaired it quickly and knowingly. There was little that Councillor Drake could not do.

Surprise was uppermost in his mind as he proceeded his unchallenged way down-slope. Except for the single line of Stygians, no more than a guard-cordon, he had seen no enemy. From what he could learn of the constant siege of the Legion position, Stygian forces had always lain thick and well arranged around the lower

reaches of the mountain. What did this absence of opposition portend?

He slid and stumbled lower still. The darkness grew around him, and he dared turn on a very small blue light which hung to his belt. It showed him that the upper brush of vegetation which first had given him cover was giving way to what might be termed tree-thickets—plants with stems, anyway, and upward-spreading foliage. No greenness here, but pallor. Probably nothing approximating chlorophyll—radiations, not light, would be the life force. Drake, also a botanist and comparative bio-chemist, paused long enough to prod at some roots. They were set into hard soil—very hard soil—like filigree work into metal.

A trail ran among the trees, and Drake, unlike Kzak, decided to follow it. Smoothness underfoot suggested much use—by Stygians. He switched off his light again and took a pistol in his right hand. Cautiously he groped his way downward.

Then, abruptly and with no warning, he came to where he could observe and understand.

The trail led him out upon a bare ledge. From its lip he could look down upon the plain below, a plain which came directly to the base of the great mountain, without benefit of foothills, and which was made visible by many fires.

Drake decided that those fires might be volcanic, or the glare from underground foundries and smelting shops—or perhaps both. In any case, silhouetted against them were strange, sprawling sheds and houses, and skeleton frameworks that must be industrial derricks or even radio masts. The Stygians were plainly of advanced culture. Closer to him were the Stygians themselves, countless masses of them.

At this point the plain sank into a valley shaped like a shallow bowl. The sides of the bowl, rising at a gentle slant toward the level of the plain, and fringed with vegetation, were pocked and pierced with cavelike doors and cut into terraces. It was like an ancient cliff-dwellers' town, and in and out of the doors and along the terraces and runways swarmed Stygians. So many and thick were they that the light of their rounded bodies made all the scene clear to Drake, even at such a distance.

"That's a sight no Inner-World explorer ever saw and lived to tell," he said to himself. "If my radio was working right, I'd try to get hold of headquarters,

and—" He broke off, wondering if he himself would live to tell of his discovery.

He studied the great valleyful of enemy, then strained his eyes to see into the less-lighted plains beyond and above. After a moment he lifted something—the telescopic sight which he had taken from the abandoned rifle. It helped him to a clearer view.

"Ah!" he breathed to himself.

For at one point on the bowl's rim was a great ramp that gave access to the plain and, beyond, to a broad way up the mountain. Here were Stygians, invisible from a distance with the unaided eye. They were able to turn off their natural lights.

THEY came upward in groups, ordered and disciplined. Each group paused, while several Stygians stationed there dealt out little dark bundles. These, opened up, proved to be canopies or cloaks, which covered the bodies of the shining creatures. Thus masked, each group trudged away and uphill.

Drake's sight quested here and there. The valley seemed to be a depot or concentration point, perhaps connected with rear positions by great underground tunnels, for it spewed forth an inexhaustible stream of fighting Stygians. And they were bound—upward.

That's it, thought Drake. That's why there was only a token string of guards around the upper reaches. They've withdrawn their forces, and they're equipping a major attack! Thousands—tens of thousands—against our hundreds!"

Again he wished for a clear radio connection with his base. He prodded dials and connections again. The mechanism only mumbled faintly. He skirted the rim of his ledge and began to push through trees in the direction of the upward stream of Stygians.

He dared not come too close. When the vibration of the ground told him that he was within sprinting distance of the main march, he paused, pondered, and finally climbed a tree. It was sweaty-barked, but he managed to reach an upper fork. His sight picked out the travel-way, thronged with Stygians in platoon-like groups, each group made up of thirty or so in regular ranks, with a slightly larger leader, evidently to command and direct.

"Why," Drake asked himself, "did they start from here? Why not from farther up?"

His orderly mind dug answer after an-

swer out of consciousness, and rejected each one. While he mused and questioned, something crashed in the shrubbery below, something heavy and purposeful. He glanced downward, eyes straining for a glimpse through the smut-dark air.

Something like an open and animated umbrella came blundering along—a Stygian flanker, reconnoitering to one side of the main body!

Drake smiled inside his helmet. This was just what he wanted.

Quickly he fingered the butts of several weapons at his belt. He decided against the obliterating ray-thrower, the almost equally destructive automatic pistol with its explosive pellet of fire. He drew a pistol-gripped weapon which bore, instead of barrel, a long, lean spindle that came to a thorn-sharp point—a dagger syringe, the universal first-aid device of all front-line soldiers.

Several studs on the handle powered the syringe to spout this or that liquid medication. Drake pressed the one that released a charge of anesthetic into the barrel. He hoped that the Stygian below was not too different from Inner-World organisms, and, as it paused almost at the foot of his tree, he jumped.

He landed astride the thing, which was rather bigger than a Galapagos tortoise. It quivered and started forward, but he had stabbed his syringe into its very center and touched the trigger-switch. Abruptly, and as he had optimistically hoped, it subsided flabbily. A powerful dose of drug had rendered it unconscious.

Quickly he knelt beside it and peeled away the masking canopy. The light of the sleeping Stygian was enough to show him its anatomy—jelly-flesh inside a tough rind, collapsed limbs and tentacles, a quietly throbbing nucleus in its center. It showed him also the slung satchel which bore tools, weapons and other devices.

He fumbled them forth, wondering what they were. In so doing, he touched the Stygian itself and plucked his hand back with a soft exclamation.

"Vibration. . . But it's asleep. What—"

He bent his head close to his defective radio.

"Static, too! The thing has some sort of a power-mechanism. . . Oop! Here it is."

He brought a watch-sized object from the satchel, examined it and touched a stud. The static hum ceased, the Stygian's

sleeping bulk seemed less radiant. He touched it again and experienced no vibration.

He saw now that the body was cased in a tight, transparent shell of artificial construction, a shell that had vibrated to the watchlike mechanism. Armor against weapons? But his syringe had pierced it like cloth. Well then, armor against what?

He lifted a hand as if to scratch his head, but his helmet stopped his fingers. Instead, inspiration smote him as if between the eyes.

"That's it! We need helmets to fight pressure down here. They need armor against the *absence of pressure up above!*"

He fingered the watch-thing. "And this isn't power enough; it's only a receiver! Somewhere below—in that bowl-valley—is the central sending machine that gives them artificial pressure and enables them to come up and fight us!"

There was more noise in the bushes. He drew back from the Stygian, exchanging syringe for pistol. A dark figure, two-legged and helmeted, was making its way toward him.

"Hi!" yelled Drake, loud enough to be heard beyond his helmet.

The figure paused and held up a tentacle.

"Quiet, you sorry fool. . . . Oh, pardon, sirr. Please make lesss noise, Excellency—Councillorr Drrake—"

"Sergeant Kzak!" Drake hurried toward him. "You were following me?"

"Sheerr chance, sirr! My whole patroll iss sscattered, hunting forr you! Threee of yourr associate Councillorrsss arre up in headquarrterrs—and, meanwhile, the grratestt forrce of Sstygiannss everr mussterred againsst uss hass begun the attack!"

BY THE time Kzak's radio had summoned the rest of the patrol, Drake had formed a plan. As he explained it to Kzak, he worked over the canopy he had peeled from the unconscious Stygian.

"We're only six, and they're countless," he pointed out. "We can't even fight our way home, let alone overthrow them. Not unless we hit the very heart of the matter."

"The heart? How?"

"Too much to explain just now. Leave it at this: Down yonder is a device that makes it possible for them to go up into altitudes which would ordinarily distress

them. I'll handle it, but this time you and the others will form a decoy—the same way I did, by a fake attack."

"But how will you rreach theerr basse?" demanded Kzak.

Drake showed him the canopy. He had torn a great vinelike growth from a tree trunk, and bent it into a circle to stiffen the edge. Other pieces he had curved inside, like umbrella ribs. The canopy thus held its form as though over a real Stygian dome-body.

"Under this," said Drake. "Don't goggle, you others. I know it's crude, but there's darkness to help. Now, let me have your ray-throwers."

"We need them badly," objected a Venusian.

"I'll need them worse. Hand them over."

They did so, as if he outranked Kzak. He shoved them into his belt and lifted the frame-supported canopy.

"Now follow me!"

He led them to the ledge. There they pieced together bits of line from their belt-pouches, and he was the first to swing down to the levels below. More scrambling and groping brought them to the plain itself. They crouched in clumps of grassy undergrowth.

"Open orrderr!" commanded Kzak. "Now—advance on my ssignal!"

Four of his men fanned out. One moved forward to new cover, taking up a position for observation and fire. Another crept to the new line, another and another. Thus cautiously the patrol advanced on that great den of Stygians. No challenge was made; enemy attention was elsewhere.

Kzak's Martian awareness-sense told him a little of Drake's sidewise journey, then forward movement—Drake, under the frame-supported canopy, very like a masked Stygian in the dim light.

Kzak waited long enough for Drake to approach whatever objective he had in mind, then shouted, "Open firre!"

From positions where they could see something of the valley's interior, the members of the patrol began to shoot with auto-rifles, swiftly but with precision.

There was a momentary confusion and wonder on the part of the Stygians; then dozens of glowing forms, their fire-arrow weapons ready in their tentacles, began to bob into view and commence a return fire. For a moment there was no real contest, for the Legionaries fought from

the dark and had illuminated targets at which to shoot. But fire-arrows set blazes here and there in the plain and revealed the crouching men. Within seconds, Kzak reflected soberly, they must retreat or be obliterated.

But over beyond the valley, at the point to which Drake had won, blazed sudden pallid streaks of fire. Kzak made out the canopy disguise, flying upward as if propelled by rocket blasts. Substantially, just that thing was happening.

It was for this that Drake had collected his comrades' ray-throwers. Holding one in each hand, he blasted strongly against the hard ground. That hard ground gave the rays purchase and resistance. He was lifted upward and on high by the very recoil.

"Then Stygia's crust is full of metal!" he told himself. "Interesting—probably valuable. . . ."

Shifting his blast, he hurled himself through the air above the valley. His position was noted, seemed to mystify the Stygians. Then they fired arrows at him, too.

But he saw what he wanted. Two of his ray-weapons were exhausted. He dropped them and in mid-air began to fall. The canopy to which he had fastened himself acted like a parachute in the dense air. He had time to draw two more ray-throwers, direct them downward, not at the Stygians but at a whirling, jumping arrangement of machinery bolted to a platform at the bottom of the dip.

At touch of the powerful ray-beams, the whole fabric seemed to shudder and burst into glows. Drake heard the scream of jammed and outraged gears, belts, connections. Then—silence!

He had destroyed the mechanism that gave pressure to the upward-mounting throngs of attackers.

The Stygians were plainly aghast. Their attention whipped away from the menace of attack by the Sky-Devils they fought. A milling horde of them rushed at the wrecked engines.

With stabbing rays, Drake hurled himself clear of the position above the valley. Then, clinging to his parachute canopy, he let himself drop downward. He fell heavily, but not heavily enough to injure himself.

When he arose after a moment, Kzak was near.

"What orrderrs?" the sergeant was asking him.

"Retreat upward, quickly!"

The patrol needed no second bidding.

NOISE of battle shook and buffeted the fortress of the Legion. Barlund, at his lookout post, took time to bewail the day he had ever accepted command.

"First that Senior Councillor here for a masquerade, then these others, searching for him and losing themselves, then a mass attack of Stygians that will wipe them all out—and probably the rest of us!" He was able to find relief in the last thought. "At least I'll die and be out of harm's way. No reprimands or court-martials, or—"

He broke off. So had the noise. He whirled toward Captain Renald.

"Why has the firing ceased? Get 'em on the speaker system."

Renald was already doing so.

"Sir," he reported, "the enemy isn't advancing."

"Retreating?"

"No—just not advancing. They've all stopped. . . . No, the lookouts say that there's movement—of men!"

Barlund took the microphone. "Hello, outpost!" he called. "Report!"

"Patrol returning, sir," came a voice. "No, not patrol. Those Councillors, sir. They say—"

Another voice, booming and triumphant—Gmapul the Venusian—was on the speaker system. "Colonel! The attackers have gone to sleep!"

"What?"

"Just what I say. No movement anywhere—thousands of them motionless! We were hiding in a hole in the rock and we saw. It's like a big wave of sleeping sickness, or a plague!"

Barlund turned from the microphone.

"Renald," he asked, "is my hair growing even whiter than usual?" Then, he turned back to the mike, asked, "What happened? How?"

His receiver buzzed, and yet another voice came in, a slurring Martian voice: "Colonel Barlund? Ssergeant Kzak rreporrtting."

"Kzak!" Barlund's heart seemed to spin on its point like a top. "Are you bringing Councillor Drake back with you?"

"No, ssirr. He iss brringing uss back

with him. And when he comes, he'll tell you why the Stygians are defeated."

Barlund sat down on the floor of the kiosk.

"Renald," he said quickly, "take over. Your first act of responsibility will be to have an orderly bring me a big drink of the strongest liquor on Stygia."

THE aftermath was a conference in Colonel Barlund's office, with the four Councillors playing host. The special ship of the Council expedition had come liberally stocked with luxuries—especially drinks. The Martian Councillor inhaled a dusty stimulant which only his race could take without going insane. Gmapul, the Venusian, drank *gull*, with an impolite smack of his enormous mouth. Colonel Barlund was old-fashioned enough for simple Terrestrial vodka. William Farnol Drake and Naomi, sipping twin silver cups of fragrant, blended wine, smiled at each other.

"All's stagnant that ends well," paraphrased Gmapul. "I suppose the war's over here, and the Legion will grow fat and stodgy."

"It's not over, and won't be for many a long day," said Barlund at once. "All that happened was that we nullified their device that allows them to come up here. It'll take them time to repair and restart it. Meanwhile we can be ready."

"Meanwhile," added Drake, "we may be able to propose peace terms."

"Yes?" prompted Barlund, pricking up his ears.

"That big pink Stygian the men brought in was a leader of some sort," Drake informed him. "He and two other important-seeming captives are in a pressure chamber, revived. Sergeant Kzak and one other intelligence non-com are on the outside of a glass pane, working out a system of signal-communications. Already they have rudiments of understanding."

"Understanding!" repeated Naomi. "If they find out we aren't enemies after all—"

"We can stop fighting and start cooperating. You see, we thought they were menaces. They evidently thought the same of us. But if we can declare a truce and get on terms of trade and mutual aid— isn't that the history of most interplanetary relations? War, then peace, then prosperous cooperation?"

"True of Venus," agreed Gmapul. "Any more *gull* in that container?"

"Plenty," the Martian Councillor told him. "And, though it is bad taste for Martians to remember it, we and Earth had a terrible war in the Twenty-eighth Century. . . . You speak, Drake, as if there will be no taking possession here by the Inner Worlds."

"Not if I can help it," said Drake. "See what the Stygians will do toward making peace. If they stand hitched, we can do likewise. Aren't there four Councillors here, enough to change policy? You're all with me, aren't you?"

"I am," assured Naomi softly.

"And we are," added the Martian. "But what profit?"

Drake pointed to a table where lay lumps of mineral.

"See those? We picked them up on the plain below here. This mountain is only a rocky bubble, blown up long ago by volcanic action. Stygia itself is a big bounding ball of metals and alloys—enough to feed all the foundries and factories of the System. The Stygians know something of how to use these things, I judge; but we know more. Leave full development to our scientific missions—after peace."

"You speak of peace as inevitable," said Barlund, a little sourly. "No soldier can quite accept the end of war."

"It's always inevitable, Colonel. The Stygians are forced to pause. We're willing to pause. We have a leader, with whom we can get into communication. He can take messages back. Let us hope—"

An orderly appeared and saluted. Barlund gave him a nodded permission to speak.

"If you please," ventured the orderly, "Sergeant Kzak says that he can understand the captive Stygians, and they can understand him. They request that he interpret a message to the commanders."

The Councillors looked at each other.

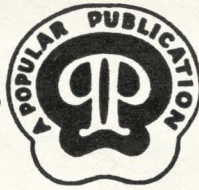
"Sounds promising," said Drake. "Shall we go and see?"

He rose, and was joined by Naomi, who put her hand through his arm.

"It sounds like the end of an adventure," she said. "I hope, William, you don't begin any other adventures without me."

Drake opened his mouth to speak.

"Careful!" warned his Martian friend. "Make no answer, Drake, if you care to keep your reputation as a statesman."



TO WIN THE WAR . . .

—the chlorine used in bleaching paper now makes explosives; the freight cars that carried the crude pulp from forests to paper mills now haul food and guns for our fighters; the men who cut down the trees have donned the khaki of their country's Army and are cutting down a brand-new crop—Nazis and Japanese.

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Popular Publications is glad to co-operate with our government in this plan. Accordingly, this issue—and all future issues of this magazine for the duration of the war—will be sixteen pages shorter than in the past. BUT—

By virtue of using a special new type in printing the magazine, more compact than the old but equally readable, there will actually be **ALMOST 10% MORE** words of stories and departments in each of the new issues than ever before!

The additional wordage, plus rapidly increasing production costs, makes necessary the increase of the price of this magazine to 25c per copy—five cents more than before.

The Editors of this magazine thank you for your co-operation. We're looking forward to the day we'll go back to our "civilian clothes"—after the war is won!

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TOP THAT 10%!





THE DARKER LIGHT

By
CLEVE CARTMILL

CHAPTER ONE

"I WANT TO DESTROY!"

JEREMY LAWTON resisted an impulse to hurl his drink into the bartender's fat face. He clenched one hand around the tall plastiglass; he pressed his wide mouth into a thin line; he glared at the round, pleasant countenance.

"Haven't you any pride?" he snarled. "Are you going to let me call you every vile name I can lay my tongue to—and just grin? Do you call yourself a man?"

The bartender chuckled. "What else, Citizen?"

"What else!" Jeremy snorted. He turned to his neighbor, a man with a public-utility stripe across his tunic. "You've heard me, Citizen. I have flung insults in his teeth, and he smiles. Isn't that a hell of a depth for a man to sink to?"

Public Utilities gave Jeremy a blank stare. He turned this on the amused bartender.

"What's he talking about?"

The bartender's paunch shook with silent laughter. "I don't know, Citizen. I haven't enjoyed myself so much in months."

"You, too," Jeremy sneered at Public Utilities. "Cattle! The whole damned race. Look at 'em!" He waved a hand at the placid groups of customers around plastitables, chatting, sipping their harmless drinks. "Not a question, not a thought—just dull acceptance of what the Light has made them."

Public Utilities blinked.

"How did the Light get into this?" Jeremy clutched thick black hair with his lean hands.

"Give me strength," he muttered. "I don't want to mash your face to a pulp, but I think I will. I—" He broke off. His broad shoulders slumped. "What's the use? They'll never see it."

His boyish face set in lines of despair. He stared moodily at his glass. Suddenly, he closed his fist around it, raised it to throwing position. He eyed the bartender.

"Do you value that mirror?"

"Why, yes, Citizen," the bartender said mildly. "It can't be replaced. It's glass, you know."

Jeremy flung his plastiglass. Its heavy base shattered the mirror behind the bartender. A thousand cracks spread fanwise from the point of contact. A few slivers tinkled to the floor.

The crash drew attention. Men and women turned their eyes, stared, shook their heads, made clucking sounds, returned to their own affairs. The bartender assumed an expression of vague sadness.

"An unfortunate accident, Citizen," he murmured.

"That was no accident!" Jeremy cried hotly. "And what are you going to do about it?"

"No accident? It must have been," Public Utilities said.

Jeremy whirled. "Keep out of this! I say it was no accident. It was deliberate—and it was wonderful. But you wouldn't know about that, nor would any of these other clods. You can't imagine the wild joy that comes with destruction. It's

Would you trade your reason for the sanity of a world?
Would you choose to live in eternal horror—that Tomorrow
might dawn for your people?

beyond your mental capacity, you empty-headed cipher. You've been robbed of imagination by the Light, you poor dupe."

"It couldn't have been anything but an accident," the man persisted. "That's all it could have been, Citizen," he repeated with dull conviction.

Jeremy got to his feet. He seized the man's shoulder, whirled him around on the stool.

"See if you call this an accident," he grated, and smashed his closed fist into the middle of the man's pleasant face.

FOR THE first time in his twenty years of life, Jeremy Lawton knew the high exultation of physical violence. The crunch of cartilage shot an ecstatic tingle up his lean arm. His heart picked up the excitement and hurled it in mighty surges along his blood stream. His dark eyes sparkled with physical pleasure as he watched Public Utilities rock against the bar and fall unconscious to the gleaming plastic floor.

Jeremy stood over the fallen man and sucked at torn knuckles. He wanted to howl with triumph, to tilt his lean head skyward and shout his challenge to the world—

"Come one, come all, Jeremy Lawton is master!"

He had subjugated an opponent, and in that moment he knew the wild joy that comes with victory. He knew, too, that this was the lost heritage of all men. If he could feel it, so could they. So *should* they, he thought with grim resolve. So should they—once the Light was destroyed.

He became aware of mild, deploring sounds. He whirled, eyes shining, to see a ring of men and women gazing sadly at the unconscious man.

They wagged their heads, clucked their tongues, murmured, "Too bad," and "Sad accident," and stood inactive.

"Call a monitor!" Jeremy challenged them. "Let's see what he'll make of it."

An emergency whistle sounded from the front entrance and a monitor shouldered through the crowd with his medical kit. He knelt over Public Utilities, felt of his broken nose, and injected a drug into his veins.

"An unfortunate accident," he said. "He will need medical attention. Is anyone else hurt?" He spied Jeremy's bleeding knuckles. "Here, Citizen, let me bandage that."

Jeremy held out his hand for treat-

ment. "It was no accident," he said smugly. "I hit him in the face with my fist, because I felt like it. I wanted to—understand?"

The monitor did not raise his head. "This will be all right by tomorrow, Citizen. It won't incapacitate you. And we'll have the other back together like new in a few days."

"But it wasn't an accident! It was deliberate!"

The monitor raised his head, frowned with effort to understand, dropped his puzzled eyes and went on with his bandaging.

"I don't know what you mean, Citizen." He put the finishing touch on the bandage. "Will you help me put this man in the ambulance, some of you?"

They carried Public Utilities out, laid him in the ambulance, and watched it whisk him over roof tops toward Central City Hospital.

Jeremy quivered with frustrated rage. He had tried, in the most pointed fashion, to arouse them—but they were beyond awakening. He stood on wide-spread feet and scowled at the floor.

He was flooded once more with despairing loneliness. One imaginative mind among these stultified creatures was doomed to eternal aloneness. There was no one to share his thoughts, to help him build a new world. A world in which man could soar again to creative heights, as outlined in the books which only he, apparently, had any desire to read. He had been told by the custodian of the ancient relics that others had looked at the books—but none had borrowed them.

Jeremy could not understand this, for they told of brilliant feats, of joyous combat, of unfettered minds—they told of what man had lost in the Light.

Now he, in his first move to re-establish that golden age of endeavor, had met with dull incomprehension. So bright had been his dream when he came here tonight. It had seemed so simple—depart from the norm and arouse others of his kind. With them destroy the mental shackles that chained men to the depths. With them destroy the Light that fetters.

A voice broke through his gloom. It was a soft, a shrewd, a knowing voice.

"That was no accident, Citizen. That was a deliberate act of destruction."

Jeremy swiveled his head. A slim, middle-aged man eyed him speculatively. In those small, gray eyes Jeremy detected fires of curiosity, of awakening. The man

wore the stripe of a food administrator—and he wore an air that stirred hope and dreams of adventure in Jeremy's breast.

They stared long at one another—the youth and the man. Presently, Jeremy put his bandaged hand on the other's thin shoulder.

"Come with me, Citizen."

CHAPTER TWO

REVOLT OF THE MEEK

HAROLD BLACK was on the verge of leaving his Philadelphia apartment to attend a dance for fellow atomic-power workers. He pressed the time stud on his wrist radio. When the voice told the hour, he realized that his chronic nervousness had hurried his dressing and he was a few minutes early.

He toyed with the dials of his television, intending to find a newscast that would consume the time remaining before his departure. When the strange young face, lean and dark, filled his screen, he did not pass it by. It was silent at the instant he tuned it in, but an intensity of expression, a gleam of dark eyes, held his fingers. When the face spoke, he leaned back to listen.

"Who I am," it said, "is unimportant. And what I say will mean nothing to the mass of world citizens. It will mean everything to a few. That few are those not cast exactly in the mold. They will have known strange uneasiness, powerful but nameless urges. They will be quick of decision, and their decisions will not necessarily conform to stated codes. If you are one of these—listen!"

Harold Black began to listen. The dance was soon forgotten. . . .

The telecast was transferred to Chief Monitor Gimbel's office screen from the department's listening tower where all programs were scrutinized by appointed experts. Chief Gimbel's massive face took on a puzzled expression as he listened to the young man in the screen.

"I will bring this message to you each day at this time," he said. "It is the story of how man has been dulled, stifled, until he is little better than a domesticated animal. He has been degraded by the Light." The young face became bitter. "The Light of Reason, it is called. Let us examine this Light . . ."

Chief Gimbel summoned his aides. He eyed the quartet plaintively. He waved at the screen.

"Was that scheduled?" he asked.

"No, sir," one informed him. "The station is not listed, either. It's operating without legal sanction."

"But that's against the code," the chief complained.

"Yes, sir."

"Then why don't we do something about it?"

"What can we do, sir?"

"We can find the station," the chief said.

"We have found it. But what then? We are powerless to interfere. The code expressly says that there shall be no interference with citizens except in the event of accidents."

"Something ought to be done," the chief said vaguely.

BARBARA WELLS was taking an ultra-violet-prime bath when the dark face came into her ceiling screen. The gaze was so intense, so personal, that she instinctively drew a cover over her lithe, brown body. Then she gazed up from her couch with breathless concentration. She was stirred by the voice. Stirred, and more, for the message focused to some degree nameless excitements she had known, it seemed, all her life.

"I have here in the studio," the voice said, "recordings from historical archives. They have collected dust for nearly two centuries. Nobody has displayed curiosity about them since they were filed. I am going to show them to you so that you will see how an insidious darkening of man's brilliance occurred in the name of reason. . . ."

History unrolled from a plastic tape and filled the screens of half a dozen persons who had not switched to sanctioned programs.

There was the scene between Professor Alex Wilson and the Psychological Council.

Professor Wilson pounded on the council table. "In the hospital for the mentally deranged, where I am employed as chief consultant, gentlemen, we have experimented with this Light. In every case of abnormality we have had a glowing success. The patients have lost their moods of mania and depression. Schizos have succeeded in bringing their various personalities into one unified whole. We have no more screams in the night, no more cowering from shadows, no more dreams! No more dreams, do you under-

stand? It has made useful citizens of those who were forever lost to society. It must be adopted, gentlemen, on a world-wide scale. Not only for mental cases—but for all men! It will bring everlasting peace.”

The council was dubious.

“There have been dreams of world peace before,” the chairman said, “and even as we dream of it here, there is the beat of distant drums. Don’t you keep up with events, Professor Wilson?”

Professor Wilson flushed. “That man is mad,” he said impatiently. “This is not the first time in history that psychotics in Southern Europe have fanned war into flame. Grant me the right to construct a gigantic Light—and you’ll see this threat of war die away. I’m serious, men. In that model on the table you have the fate of the world. Its invisible rays soothe, remove greed, lust for power, and all the other mental factors which have made chaos since the beginning of time. It does not, however, affect the strictly normal person. But let me show you. Let me activate it. It will be effective on this whole group.”

Professor Wilson applied power to the small, colorless pillar that stood in the center of the table. Then, over the frowning countenances of council members stole an expression of contentment, peace and satisfaction. Lines disappeared from foreheads, hands unclenched. Eyes stopped burning, mouths relaxed.

Professor Wilson cut the power—and the faces were normal again.

Not quite normal, though. An air of pleasant contemplation was manifest in the group. They were no longer as dubious.

“What is your plan of action?” the chairman inquired.

“I propose to construct a Light—I call it the Light of Reason, gentlemen—of magnificent proportions. One that will handle enough power to project its effect all over the world. Then I propose to watch results.”

The half-dozen screens in scattered parts of the world that carried this scene blanked out. The lean face of Jeremy Lawton filled them again.

“For those who are still listening,” he said, “there is no need to show in detail how Professor Wilson was allowed to experiment; how the Light accomplished predicted results; how war died out; how a world dictatorship came into being. But there is need to point out facts.

“All men became equal—equally dull. The dictator is chosen according to rule and has become no more than a superintendent of the Light. Police, who were a stimulating deterrent in those days, have become monitors, experts in first-aid only. Scientific progress has died. No single invention to make life easier, or more comfortable, or more exciting, has been recorded in nearly two hundred years.

“In days before the Light, men were creative. They composed stirring musical and literary works—according to ancient historical volumes I have read. A place in the sun—it was called—was the heritage of all men, and they reached it according to their ability.

“But the word genius has no meaning now. Men have forgotten how to live, have learned how to exist. This civilization has died, as an ancient philosopher put it, from an overdose of First Principles. As dictatorships of history died from becoming too dictatorial, monarchies too monarchical, so the Light of Reason has killed those faculties which were above reason, and which were man’s heritage in contradistinction to those of the animals.

“But I am not merely calling these facts to your attention. I have a plan of action. I believe that there are others capable of understanding the depth of degradation wrought by this darker Light. Let us meet, let us plan, and let us put out this damned Light forever. Let us restore man to his place in the sun!

“I am going to give you my name and address. Communicate with me. Come to me—”

“THERE is only one answer,” Jeremy Lawton told the seven in his apartment. “Revolution!”

The slim, middle-aged food administrator interrupted. “I doubt,” he said dryly, “if any here know the meaning of the term, Citizen.”

“You’re right, Dr. Barton,” Jeremy went on. He turned to the others. “Since I made the first telecast four months ago, I’ve put in some long hours on the old records. I studied the technique of revolt. It means, simply, gaining control of something somebody else controls. In this case, the Light.”

Barbara Wells asked, “What do we do with it when we’ve got it? We can’t hide it in here.”

A grin circulated. The Light was eight hundred and thirty feet tall. The men looked at her, tall and slim and yellow-haired, with appreciative eyes.

"We smash it," Jeremy said simply. "Smash the mechanism that operates it. You know, of course, that there is only one Light, and its secret has been long since forgotten. Amplifying receivers in every city in the world pick up its emanations and retransmit them in their communities. Destroy the Light, destroy the source—and man is whole again."

Harold Black unfolded himself from a long divan. He towered in the room, lank, stoop-shouldered, stringy-haired, intense. "There isn't any mechanism," he said. "No moving parts."

"But surely," Jeremy protested, "there is a nuclear receptor that could be smashed."

"We-el," Black drawled. "There is, but almost nobody knows how to find it."

"Do you?"

"Yes, but I doubt if there are more than three others who know about it."

"As long as you know, we're all right—if you don't get killed."

Dr. Barton interposed again. "I'd like to make a proposal."

Jeremy sat down. They listened to the slim food administrator.

"When I first talked to Citizen Lawton," Dr. Barton began, "nearly a year ago, I was caught up in the idealism of his proposition. Those aberrations, those departures from the norm which the Light subdues, were what men lived by. Dreams, real and fanciful. Hope. Brilliant feats without frames of reference. I thought they should be restored. I no longer think so."

Jeremy frowned, swept the group with dark, questioning eyes. They were intent on Dr. Barton.

"They had wars in those days," Dr. Barton went on. "There was bloodshed on a vast scale. There were suicides, murders, anti-social acts without number that swelled the sum total of human unhappiness. Are we going to restore those conditions? I think not."

Jeremy's frown became a scowl.

"It has occurred to me," Dr. Barton continued, "that we here are in a most satisfying position. The world is ours, to remake as we choose. We are the stand-outs. We have imagination, intelligence. Why, in the practical sense, should we bother with the others? Ideals are all very well, and I'll admit that I put

up the money for a television station and money to bring you here, while motivated by ideals. But after all, we have our lives to live. I advocate that we live them."

Jeremy interrupted hotly, "And make slaves of those we propose to liberate? We won't do it. I forbid it!"

"And who," Dr. Barton inquired in his soft, shrewd voice, "are you to forbid?"

"The next dictator!" Jeremy snapped.

"Ah?" Dr. Barton eyed the group, one by one. "If we choose to allow it only, citizen. You have presented your case. Let me present mine, and then let us have a show of wills."

Dr. Barton's proposal was simplicity itself. Allow the Light to continue in operation, overthrow the present dictatorship, establish their own. Then live in such luxury as they desired, remake the laws to suit their ends, and provide that the dictatorship of their kind continue forever.

He did not state it so baldly—but that was the gist. And they listened, listened intently when he told of pleasures they could achieve after amending present codes. He built them a world which appealed. There was no doubt of its appeal to the others, Jeremy could see.

"But we can't!" he cried. "The whole idea behind this meeting is to liberate men from the Light. That's why we're here. I won't listen to any more of this. You're trying to make men domestic animals living for our pleasure. Sit down, Doctor."

"I suggest a vote," Dr. Barton insisted, his small gray eyes steady as his voice. "How do you vote, Citizen Wells?"

Barbara Wells smiled. "I'll string along with Jeremy. I like the way his hair curls."

"I like your idea, Doctor," Harold Black said.

Rhodes Fisher, a fat young man from South Africa, kneaded his cheek with a chubby fist.

"I don't know exactly what you're talking about. I think Citizen Wells is awful pretty, though. Whatever she does is all right with me."

Carl Blue, lounging in a corner, lit a cigarette while Dr. Barton's eyes questioned.

"What's in it for me?" he asked dryly. "I'm just beginning to get the idea behind Dr. Barton's proposition. What do you offer, Citizen Barton?"

Dr. Barton smiled. "A man after my own heart, Citizen. What do I offer?"

Wealth, high social position, pretty women."

"And you?" Carl Blue asked Jeremy. "What do you offer?"

"A chance to do mankind the greatest service in history," Jeremy said shortly.

Blue sighed. "I'm afraid I'm practical. You have my vote, Doctor."

Abdul Hamil and Ray Ford remained. The former, hawk-faced, dark, with flashing teeth, cast his lot with Barton. Ford, with an eager smile for Barbara Wells, moved to her side.

"An impasse," Dr. Barton said softly. "Well, time will tell."

Jeremy, flushed with anger, strode to Dr. Barton's side and glowered down at him.

"Get out of here!" Jeremy grated. "Get—out!"

DR. BARTON'S lips twitched with faint amusement. "A convert to my code," he commented. "You see, Citizen, you are subscribing to my theory. If anything interferes—eliminate it."

"I said get out," Jeremy answered coldly. "Or I'll put you out."

Dr. Barton's face set. "If you are going to be troublesome, young man, you are in for trouble of another sort." He turned imperious eyes on Harold Black.

"Protect me!" he commanded.

Black was instantly on his feet, towering over Jeremy.

"Citizen, leave him alone. Leave the dictator alone."

Jeremy glared up at Black. He calculated distances in his mind, and put all his weight in a short, jabbing punch at Black's face. As it connected, he felt once more that fierce joy of combat. His heart pounded, blood suffused his face. He wanted to howl.

Black, too, apparently was caught up in this strange delight. His head rocked back from Jeremy's blow, and he growled deep in his chest as he caught Jeremy's throat in both hands. They fell to the floor, gasping, growling, kicking.

The others watched, fascinated. Barbara Wells put both hands against her cheeks, breathed in quick gasps. Abdul Hamid's dark face took on a look of evil glee. Ray Ford's mouth dropped open. Carl Blue and Dr. Barton showed an amused aloofness as the two young men thrashed about the plastic floor. Rhodes Fisher's plaintive face turned to Barbara.

"What's all the fightin' for?" he asked.

Suddenly, the combat stopped. Jeremy and Black got to their feet and circled each other. Their faces were deadly intent; their feet moved in graceful patterns. Barbara Wells asked a short question—and deadliness went out of them.

"May I have this dance?" she asked.

The apartment rang with shouts of laughter. Involuntary smiles twitched at Jeremy's and Black's mouths, and they made one or two futile passes at each other before they joined the general laughter.

They rocked back and forth on their heels. They gasped. They caught great, shuddering breaths, and tears came into their eyes. They had forgotten the cause of combat.

"That—was wonderful!" Jeremy cried brokenly.

"Yes," Black managed. "Thanks so much."

Dr. Barton interrupted. "Shall we continue?" he asked softly. His voice carried new assurance.

Jeremy sobered. An issue had been raised, and he had lost. Dr. Barton was to be one of them now—despite what he could do about it.

CHIEF GIMBEL did not relax in the dictator's guest chair. He held his great body on the edge of it with unconscious effort. His blocky face was gloomy, and its gloom was reflected in the dictator's countenance. It was ordinarily a merry collection of features resembling, to a certain extent, a peaceful cherub's.

"But what are they after?" Dictator Luke Williams asked with a touch of petulance.

Chief Gimbel sighed. "I don't know, Citizen Dictator," he confessed. "They say one word over and over. Revolution. I don't know what they're talking about, and my staff is beginning to get tired. Special meetings night after night. We've had no accidents, but we have to attend them."

"But I understand, Citizen Monitor, that they want to destroy the Light. Why—it can't be done. The code says so."

"I'm all mixed up," the chief complained.

They lapsed into silence, looked at, but without seeing, the furnishings of the great room. Here were telescreens directly connected to circuits in all parts of the world. On his respective screen, the resi-

dent commissioner of Kamchatka, Lhasa, Kansas City, Belgrade, or Buenos Aires could hold personal audience with the dictator and obtain an interpretation of a point of law, or pass the time of day. Here was the nerve center of world government—on the screens which paneled the high walls.

"But didn't you tell them," the dictator pursued, "that they were violating the code?"

"I told them," Chief Gimbel replied dispiritedly, "but they told me to go chase a meteor. That girl did."

"But they say they're going to overthrow me," the dictator whined. "What would Mary say? I can't go home and tell her that I've been replaced without due process. They shouldn't want to do this to me. I never hurt them."

Chief Gimbel sighed again. "And I wonder what will become of me? I've been a monitor all my life, and so was my father before me."

"Then kill 'em all," said a new voice.

A young man came into the big room. He walked with quick, nervous steps. This nervousness extended to an eyebrow, which twitched spasmodically. His wide full mouth twisted when he talked. One thin white hand pulled occasionally at his ear or plowed through thick black hair.

"Kill 'em all," he repeated. "Hullo, Citizen Chief. Hullo Uncle Luke. That's your answer. Simple, really." He sat on the dictator's desk and swung thin legs. They were almost as white as his shorts and tunic.

The dictator was shocked. "What are you saying, Richard?"

"Just that. Dog eat dog. They want to run you out—run them out first. Simple."

The dictator had been watching the young man's eyebrow with fascination. A look of annoyance overspread his cherub's face.

"I wish you wouldn't move that eyebrow, Richard. I get to watching it, and never hear anything you say. What was it, now?"

The dictator shut his eyes, and Richard Williams repeated his suggestion. "Take 'em to the top of the Light and heave 'em off. That'll teach 'em."

Richard Williams considered this, and before his uncle or the chief could reply, added, "Fun, too."

Chief Gimbel organized his thoughts. "But you can't. It's against the code. It's anti-social!"

"Ever see dogs fight?" Richard asked. "Corner one, he'll fight back. You're cornered. Fire with fire, then."

"Stop twitching that eyebrow!" his uncle begged. "How did dogs get into this?"

"Can't beat Nature," Richard said obscurely. "She comes out on top every time."

The dictator opened his mouth, shut it, muttered, "What's Nature got to do with it?"

"Everything. The light regiments aberrations. Dull dogs not affected. Makes brilliant people dull dogs. So, no progress, the world is static for two centuries. Nature waits; she pushes up a few like Jeremy Lawton. He sees what Light does. So do I—always did. Nature comes through again. I tell you, you can't beat her. Or maybe—" He halted, closed his eyes in concentration. "Damn! Never thought of that. This is serious. Damn! Got to stop 'em."

"What are you talking about?" demanded the chief.

"Just talking. You wouldn't understand. Got to stop 'em. Think I'll join 'em. Got a thought for 'em."

"Richard!" his uncle expostulated. "Please hold that eyebrow still and explain yourself."

"Look, Uncle Luke. I'll make you a proposition. If I lose out, and they take over, promise me something. Promise to take 'em up on the Light and throw 'em over. Ought to use guns—No guns any more, though. Oh well, an eight-hundred-foot dive is good enough. Promise, eh?"

"Even if I could understand," the dictator complained, "I couldn't do it. The code—"

"Code!" Richard snorted. He got off the desk, strode around with quick, jerky steps. "Code!" He walked in silence, his great eyes slitted with thought. He stopped suddenly, snapped his fingers. "Serve 'em right, though. Let 'em win, I think. Sure. What a joke!" He vented a dry cackle. "Joke on them, all right. Look, Uncle, I think I'll join the revolution."

"I don't know what a revolution is, even, Richard."

"Self-destruction," Richard said succinctly. "Fun."

"Suicide is against the code," Chief Gimbel said virtuously.

Richard smiled at him. In the smile were troubling overtones. Chief Gimbel shuddered, turned away.

"But why, Richard, why?"

"You wouldn't understand," Richard said crisply. "You don't know about dreams. Don't know how it is to live with dolts. I see what they're after. What a joke!"

CHAPTER THREE

"SMASH THE LIGHT!"

RICHARD WILLIAMS faced the group in Jeremy Lawton's apartment.

"No converts, eh?" he said.

"No converts," Jeremy admitted dolefully. "The poor unfortunates couldn't understand what we were trying to explain. The shame of it! To degrade the highest intelligence in the animal kingdom in the name of reason."

"Can't blame 'em," Richard said. "For not knowing, I mean. All they ever knew was conformance—the code. Except us, of course." He chuckled, explained, "Joke. Not degraded, anyway. Didn't affect ordinary dolt. He's still the same. Just different conditioning. Well, what now? No revolution, so what now?"

"I don't know," Jeremy said gloomily. "According to history, you've got to get converts to a revolution. We tried. We went all over the world; we talked; we explained. And they laughed. They thought it was entertainment."

"Sure, sure," Richard said impatiently. He turned to Dr. Barton. "What about you, Citizen? You're the leader of the palace revolution. Lawton's down. What about you?"

"I fear," Dr. Barton said, "that I am equally without inspiration."

"Not me," Richard said. "Wanted to see, first, if you had ideas. No ideas. Well, here's one. Go up to Uncle Luke and tell him to go home. That's all. Nobody'll stop you. No guards. No need for 'em, because there's no guns any more. Just go up and say, 'Go home, old man, here's the new dictator!' Who is, by the way? Lawton? Dr. Barton?"

They absorbed the suggestion. As its simplicity struck home they began to chuckle. "Go tell Uncle Luke to go home. Go home, old man. Here's the new dictator."

Jeremy and Dr. Barton thought of this point at the same time. They eyed each other warily. Then Jeremy answered Richard Williams.

"We're equally divided," he said. "Four votes for me as the new dictator, four

for Dr. Barton. I guess you have the deciding vote. Will you cast it for one of us?"

Richard smiled. "No need—yet. Think it over. Let you know later. I like being balance of power long as possible. Let's go see Uncle Luke."

They did. The dictator complained, wrung his chubby hands a little.

"But why?" he asked timidly. "I'll go, but what can I tell Mary? She will be disappointed. She won't like it."

The dictator departed. The new regime looked at one another. Triumph, eagerness, uneasiness, mingled in their eyes.

Richard Williams stood apart in the big room. The only sound was his chuckling. They looked at him.

"Joke," he said.

THEN Richard Williams shot a slitted glance around the group, eyeing one after the other.

"Who's dictator?" he inquired. "Fight it out. I'm not voting. I'm an onlooker. Always have been."

Tension mounted in the big room. Barbara moved to Jeremy's side. Rhodes Fisher and Ray Ford followed her, as if by command. Dr. Barton, Carl Blue, Harold Black and Abdul Hamid aligned themselves in a group.

Jeremy and Dr. Barton stared steadily at each other. No move was made—yet.

Richard Williams seated himself in his uncle's chair, and the smile dissolved from his saturnine countenance. Ideas flitted through his mind, and he found some of them pleasant.

As an observer, he was amused by the fact that a handful of persons had taken over government of the world. A polyglot group from several continents had simply moved in with no bloodshed—yet.

But as Richard Williams, he felt an eager excitement. He was going to know; he was going to know! At last the opportunity had arrived to know the meaning of his dreams, his visions. Just outside the borders of his consciousness had lain a strange world, and now at last he was going to see that world.

True, it had remained for Jeremy Lawton to conceive the means whereby that world would be opened to him, with its phantasmal shapes, its *outré* population, its answers to his day and night dreams. He had stood on its borders for a long time, and now he was about to step out of this into the unknown. If only they would hurry; if only they did not reach a

compromise. He cared little which faction triumphed. He could use Jeremy, who wished to smash the Light, or Dr. Barton, who wished to enslave the human race for his own purposes and was therefore evil from Jeremy's standard. Either faction was suitable for Richard's purpose.

Yet they stood quiescent, filled with—hatred? No matter, they did nothing.

"Afraid?" he taunted. "Who's dictator? Dictators are strong—or their followers are. Who's strong here?"

They tensed further at this—but still no move was made.

"Lawton," Richard persisted. "Are you going to allow Dr. Barton to acquire a world-size stable of cattle to use as suits his fancy? Are you?"

"No, by heaven!" Jeremy said. "I warn you," he continued to Dr. Barton, "that you will not do this thing. I am going to be dictator, and I am going to destroy the Light."

"That," Dr. Barton said suavely, "we shall see."

"Talk, talk," Richard taunted. "Talk, talk."

Harold Black made a motion. It was not necessarily one of attack, but Jeremy interpreted it in that way. He launched himself in an arcing dive at the tall atomic-power man, and threw him to the floor. This acted as a signal for the others.

Carl Blue closed with Barbara, and soon had her helpless on the floor. Ray Ford jumped for Dr. Barton; Rhodes Fisher warded off Abdul Hamid with fat, futile hands.

Richard Williams watched the mêlée with an aloof smile. The growls, the snarls, the flailing blows, failed to arouse any emotion but amusement. The petty little fools, fighting for a nonexistent advantage! He, Richard Williams, was already the real dictator—though not of this world. He had no wish to be dictator of this world. But that other world, just beyond his consciousness—now there was a world worthy of the name.

Let them wallow, let them kill each other. Some one would survive—and that one would be enough.

They did not kill each other. Harold Black relaxed his grip on Jeremy's throat when the latter slumped in unconsciousness. Dr. Barton kned Ray Ford in the abdomen and had him down in a trice. Abdul Hamid made short work of Rhodes Fisher, and Carl Blue had begun to yawn,

seated astride the entirely helpless girl.

The victors looked at each other. They smiled.

Dr. Barton, sleek, unruffled, eyed the vanquished quartet.

"Will you swear allegiance to me?" he asked. "I am dictator by right of might, and if you swear I shall see that you are suitably rewarded. Otherwise, you may find circumstances most unpleasant."

They looked at Jeremy. He had regained consciousness and his boyish face seemed to age as his square shoulders slumped.

"You've won, I guess. I've got to give in," he said slowly.

His supporters echoed his attitude. Rhodes Fisher without comprehension, Ray Ford because Barbara submitted.

"Then let's rest for today," Dr. Barton said. "We can meet tomorrow and decide how best to utilize the world for our own pleasure. Find your own quarters."

THEY broke up and drifted away. Jeremy and Barbara presently found themselves together on a roof garden, gazing down on the city. Across from them was the towering pillar of the Light.

"Look at it," Jeremy said bitterly. "Look at it. All those people down there, in this city and all over the world, and all these people up here in taxis and transports—they're slaves. Slaves to the Light, first of all, and now slaves to its keeper."

Barbara laid a hand on his arm. "Maybe we can find a way to destroy it?"

"How?" he barked. "Harold Black is the only one who knows how, and he's been with Barton from the first."

"We'll find a way," she said. "You and I."

He turned to look at her, at her yellow hair, her luminous eyes, her curved body and slim legs. He looked into her eyes and felt strange and nameless emotions stirring in his breast.

"I know it's against the code," he said, fumbling for words, "but I feel—"

"Yes?" she breathed. "Yes?"

"It's so hard to say. I've read books where the words were, but they didn't mean much to me then. They still don't. I don't know how to say it, but I'm—"

"Yes? What are you, Jeremy?"

"Sorry," said the voice of Richard Williams. "Don't like to break into a scene like this, but it made me uncomfortable. Got a proposition for you."

Jeremy whirled, eyed the newcomer with resentment. "What do you want?"

"Freedom, I guess," Richard said. "Haven't the courage to free myself, but thought you might. You want to destroy the Light?"

"Yes. Do you know how?"

"Sure, sure. Other things first, though. Got a proposition. No—" he said, as Barbara started a courteous retreat—"don't go away. You're in it, too."

She came back. They waited for Richard to proceed.

"Let's sit down," he said. "Wall hides us. Dr. Barton might see, might wonder, might do something." They sat down. "Proposition involves returning Uncle Luke to the dictator's seat."

"But that's undoing all the good we've done!" Jeremy said.

"Good? Good? Done nothing, yet. Sent the old man home; made him sick with worry. That's no good. Done nothing more."

"But we've removed the dictator."

"Got to put him back. Got to kill Barton."

"Kill?" Jeremy faltered. "Kill Dr. Barton?"

"Sure, sure. Can't leave him alive. He'll ruin everything. Leave him to me, I'll take care of it. Don't mind that. It's a pleasure, really. You got to do the other, though. Haven't the courage, myself. Don't know why, but just haven't. Want to see it, but can't do it. Got to get Uncle Luke back first, though."

"But why? What's the idea behind it?"

"Won't tell, yet. You must promise first. Get back Uncle Luke—I'll kill Barton."

"I won't promise until I know why."

Richard Williams sighed, twitched his eyebrow. "Very well. Barton's mad—but not enough. Without the Light he'd be cunning, cruel. With it, just cunning. Bad for the race either way." He paused, shot a gleaming look at them in turn. "I'm mad, too. So are you—both of you. Hopelessly, without the Light."

They did not reply. The idea was too sudden. They needed time to understand.

Richard continued, "Why do we stand out? Why do we question? Easy. We're mad. The Light affects small strata. Those above normal; those short of physical madness. Have been only a few of these. I've studied more than you. I know. Twenty-nine years ago two hopelessly insane persons were put in an asylum—then they died. Remember how

Light cured mental cases? Prevents 'em, too. But now a few got together on your inspiration. Therefore, you're mad. These others, too, except maybe Fisher. He doesn't belong.

But take Dr. Barton—no initiative, but intelligence to use ideas. If Light's smashed while he's alive, he'll be mad. Not enough, though, to be locked up—just enough to rule badly. He'll rule, too, and be a killer. See why Uncle Luke has to come back? He's sane."

JEREMY puzzled over this startling idea. Presently, he believed that Richard Williams was correct. The only reason why he and these others rose above the normal was that their mental aberrations were strong enough to overcome, to some extent, the effect of the Light. That meant insanity, if the Light—

"But that means," he said slowly, "we'll be mad if the Light is smashed. We'll be insane."

"Sure, sure," Richard said cheerfully. "What did you expect?"

"Why, I expected to administrate a government that would allow men to live freely. Let them be genius, or idiot, or whatever they were endowed with by nature."

"Well?"

"I see I didn't think it through," Jeremy said ruefully. "I didn't see that I, and others like me, would let go of sanity once the Light was destroyed. I see it now."

"What'll you do about it?"

"I don't know," Jeremy said. "I don't know. I wonder what it's like to be mad?"

"Things," Richard said. "Beautiful, mad, savage, horrible—but not lonely. You been lonely?"

Jeremy smiled sourly. "I've been lonely." He looked at Barbara. "And now, when it seemed I wasn't to be any more, this—" He broke off.

"How are the ideals now?" Richard asked. "Man freed from the Light. All that business."

"He still has the right," Jeremy said stoutly. "Look what this means. If a few of us push through its influence, there must be others, many of them, not so far. Without the Light, they'd be brilliant. Why, the world ought to know a golden age of progress like nothing ever mentioned in history. But to smash the Light, knowing you'll be hopelessly insane the next instant—"

"Ideals not so good then, eh?"

Jeremy flushed. No, the ideals were not so good. He had been full of dreams—this was grim reality.

"What do you think, Barbara?" he asked.

She looked at him with frightened eyes. She grinned, but the fright still remained.

"You'd go down in history. You couldn't read it, of course, being in a mental hospital, but you'd be a big man. Me, too, I suppose. I couldn't read it either."

She was silent for a moment. Then, "I'll tell you what," she proposed, "let's start saying to each other, without benefit of sanction, 'I love you, I love you, I love you.' Maybe we can form a habit pattern so that we'll continue saying it when we don't know what the words mean any longer."

"You think we ought to smash the Light, then?"

"What else?" she asked, beginning to cry a little.

CHAPTER FOUR

"MY SANITY FOR A WORLD'S"

JEREMY looked at Richard. "You've known about this for some time?"

"About what the Light did to people? Sure, sure. For years."

"And you've wanted it smashed. You said so. Why didn't you smash it?"

Richard's mouth twisted; his eyebrow twitched. "No courage. Physical, that is. Courage to face it, eagerness, really—but not to do it. You, now, are no physical coward. You could smash it."

"But—madness. That makes everything different. Why should I sacrifice my sanity?"

"Barton," Richard said. "He's the reason. Hysteroid type. Even while the Light operates, he'd get rages. You've seen. With the Light gone, though, there'd be mass killings if he felt like it. Got to kill him and restore Uncle Luke."

"But—madness," Jeremy repeated.

Barbara's eyes were still frightened. "What would it be like? You seem to know everything," she said to Richard. "What would it actually be like?"

He frowned. "Hard to say, really. Twilight, I think. No blacks and whites. Grays. Weird, savage, beautiful. Both of you manic-depressive, I think. Don't know about that. I'm schizo. All I know is dreams—waking dreams. Much better

than this. No orderliness. Exciting. Been only on the edges, though. Inside, must be wonderful. I want that—more than anything. This world is petty, unimportant, no reason for order, no movement. Plenty in mine—with the Light gone."

"Madness," Jeremy muttered again. "I—don't know if I want that."

Richard Williams eyed Jeremy. It was win or lose, now. Jeremy must smash the Light. He must! For Richard's world waited, just beyond the wall of consciousness, and the broken Light was a doorway through that wall.

The Devil's Domain—it had been called before the Light—a world of twisted shadows. But magnificent shadows—barbaric, terrifying, arousing a terrible desire. That elephant caravan in the valleys of a place he had named Shma. The golden trappings, the measured tread, the millions of slaves not clearly seen. He could see it, live in it—once the Light was no more.

Those excursions by night to great cities beyond space. His throne. Wars against the enemy who would usurp, destroy the splendor of those cities. Unbelievable gardenlands glimpsed darkly beyond translucent seas. Forgotten ivory towers, lovely and unbroken in moonlight.

His world awaited, and he was chained here amidst prosaic surroundings. Everywhere dull counterparts of dull men, buildings, planes.

Richard cared nothing for that everyday reality called science. Reality to most, it was to him a torturous nightmare in which he moved while surging toward that world of wit, sensuous joy and wild delight.

Yet he was under no illusions as to its meaning. By ordinary standards he was insane, held from the final limits of insanity by invisible emanations from a makeshift—the Light. It had been an answer, two hundred years ago. It had emptied mental hospitals, pushed men off creative heights, and trapped those endowed by nature to soar beyond those heights.

The irony was that nature would triumph in the end. A few had pushed through the barrier in this generation. In the next centuries there would be more, and some day the Light would be destroyed by accident or age—and the whole world would be filled with madmen.

He cared nothing for this. If the world

were peopled with maniacs, it was all right with him. But here was a point of attack against Jeremy Lawton's natural fear of breaking the Light. For the young fool put ideals above everything. He symbolized the heroes of all time. Admirable, no doubt, but fools from Richard Williams' viewpoint—even though that viewpoint was twisted by aberration and therefore might be wrong.

Jeremy himself was beginning to realize the import of Richard's revelation. He and Barbara, and such others who had risen above the stultifying influence of the Light, would be plunged into that caveman's world of horror—insanity. He had read enough, heard enough, of the world before the Light to realize dimly, but to a frightening degree, what madness meant.

Barbara. He had come to her on a tele-screen, she to him on a transport plane. Out of all the millions, they had found each other. Was he to destroy what this could become for the sake of an ideal, a mistaken ideal at that?

Richard broke into his thoughts. "You can save all men, Lawton. Live forever. Immortalize your name."

"And what will that get me?" Jeremy asked bitterly. "Your realm of shadows."

"If the Light goes on," Richard continued, "all hell will break loose some day."

He went on to explain how nature would push more and more through the barrier with each generation until the day when the Light would be broken by accident or design, or age, and then would come the consequent chaos. In his crisp, unfinished sentences, he painted a picture of screaming men and cowering women. Maniacs loose on the Earth.

It affected, but did not convince Jeremy. He was a man, with the right to live out his natural span as best he could. He was no hero.

"I've got to think," he said. "I'll let you know tomorrow."

DR. BARTON was changed when the meeting was called on the following day. Even Rhodes Fisher could see it. Barton's expression made Fisher uneasy. True, the slim, middle-aged dictator was as sleek, as suave, as before. But the eyes had changed. They indicated smoldering emotions near the surface. They spoke of things to which Fisher could put no name, and from which he wanted to hide. He attempted

to do so, by moving behind Barbara Wells.

But still the eyes seemed to seek him out, seemed to say, "I'm looking at you, Fisher."

"The first item on our agenda," Dr. Barton began in his soft voice, "will be consideration of a new palace. This building was good enough, no doubt, for the clods who inhabited it before, but my taste runs more to splendor and height."

"Where will you get the money?" Jeremy asked.

Dr. Barton's eyes sparked. "From the people! Please to be quiet." Dr. Barton took from his tunic a long, curved, gleaming blade. "Our museum had this on display. It will be my badge of office. It has other uses, Citizen Lawton, as you may learn."

"Rages," Barbara murmured. "Richard was right."

Dr. Barton turned his attention to her. "Please do not interrupt! My—ah, badge may be used on you."

Deep within Rhodes Fisher's fat and hitherto placid interior an emotion stirred. Atavistic, old as history itself, it aroused determination, anger and the resolve to protect. To protect the woman, the mate, his heart had chosen.

"You leave her alone," he growled, and stepped from behind Barbara.

Dr. Barton's eyes took on a savage gleam of pleasure. He smiled. That was all it was—a smile. But Rhodes Fisher shuddered, shrank inside. Yet he stood his ground, fighting the desire to submit. His protective instinct was stronger than that for self-preservation.

Even when Dr. Barton moved toward him, he continued to stand. His fat hands were half raised; his outthrust chin overshadowed the fright in his eyes.

"And what have we here?" Dr. Barton asked softly. "A dissenter? Surely we have no use for you."

The knife moved. It sliced Rhodes Fisher's fleshy throat. It was over before the act registered on the others. His life bubbled out in a scarlet, pulsing stream, and he fell, presently, with a look of wonder in his eyes.

Jeremy moved, noticing as he did so that all the others attacked.

Richard Williams watched. What had begun as a movement to relieve Dr. Barton of his weapon, now became a killing charge. They growled; they mouthed incoherencies; they snarled like animals. With detached interest, Richard noted

manifestations of derangements from simple neurasthenia to homicidal mania.

He saw Dr. Barton fight back—as the trite phraseology of the ancients put it—like a cornered rat. He saw the knife strike home in Abdul Hamid's stomach, saw that dark gentleman stagger out of the mêlée and writhe on the slick, bright floor. He saw the entire group attack as a single unit. He did not see Dr. Barton die.

Die he did, though his blood continued to flow for a little after they had reeled away. He died while buried under his attackers.

Then they looked at each other, the survivors. They looked at each other and then at the knife buried in Dr. Barton's throat. They dropped their eyes to the floor, made furtive attempts to wipe away spatters of blood from their clothes. They said nothing.

RICHARD went to the great door, opened it, called, "Come in, Uncle Luke. You can take over now."

The round, merry face, suffused with happiness, changed with shock to a mask of horror.

"What—what—?" he sputtered, turning from the bloody floor to Richard.

"Never mind," Richard said. "No time now. Must hurry. You can mop up." He turned to Jeremy. "This is Uncle Luke. Look at him."

Jeremy looked at him. He began to see dimly what Richard meant. This man was sane. True, his characteristics inspired a sort of aloof contempt, but he and his kind were more fitted to run the world than Jeremy and this pack so thinly separated from psychopathia.

Light or no Light, here was the man.

"Come with me," Richard said.

Barbara fell in behind them, shaking still from the excess of powerful emotion.

Presently they arrived at the Light.

"Thought something like this would happen," Richard said. "Thought so. That's why I gave Barton that knife. Thought he'd show himself. See what I mean now—Light or no Light?"

"I see," Jeremy said. "I see, all right. I see something else, too. The Light keeps us from that sort of thing. If my kind is capable of that kind of action while the Light is operating, what will we be like if we smash it?"

"Madness, Citizen. Told you that."

"But there must be others! Those who didn't get in touch with me. They'll

make the world a fearful shambles."

"Not many," Richard said. "Doubt it, really. We're the trials of nature. If we survive, she makes more. Ought to prevent that, really. Make no end of a mess. Well, come inside the tower. Show you the gadget. Destroy the Light forever."

He showed Jeremy. He gave Jeremy the knife. One blow would do it. Richard bowed.

"Leave you two here. Give me ten minutes. Got a place I want to be. Near the Door . . . door into my world. Luck."

He went away.

Richard was right, Jeremy thought. Nature would triumph in the end. An obstacle had been thrown in her way, halting the forward march of evolution by reducing that narrow group of intellects responsible for progress to the level of the masses which it did not affect. So Nature went underground for two hundred years—to plan, develop and wait. Now she sent up feelers, a few men and women like himself and Barbara, pushed them over the obstacle.

It seemed clear that as long as the Light endured, an increasing number of Nature's means of fighting that restriction would emerge, and soon the world would enter once again on its forward, progressive phase of movement.

As long as the Light endured.

But, as Richard had pointed out, these experiments were madmen—without the Light. If he, Jeremy, did not smash the Light's nerve center, and if others also left it inviolate, within a few generations the world should be filled with others who possessed initiative, brilliance, inventiveness. These would multiply in time, and then—and then if the Light were destroyed, every last one of Nature's successes would be plunged into madness.

"I don't want to do this," he groaned. "I don't want to face what comes next, for us. Well, we'd be together."

"Link hands, if you like, Jeremy."

"I must smash it, though. I must."

All the hardness went out of Barbara, all the protective exterior dissolved. She took his boyish face between tender hands. She cried a little.

"Klss me, Jeremy."

He did so. It was a long caress, full of the things that might have been.

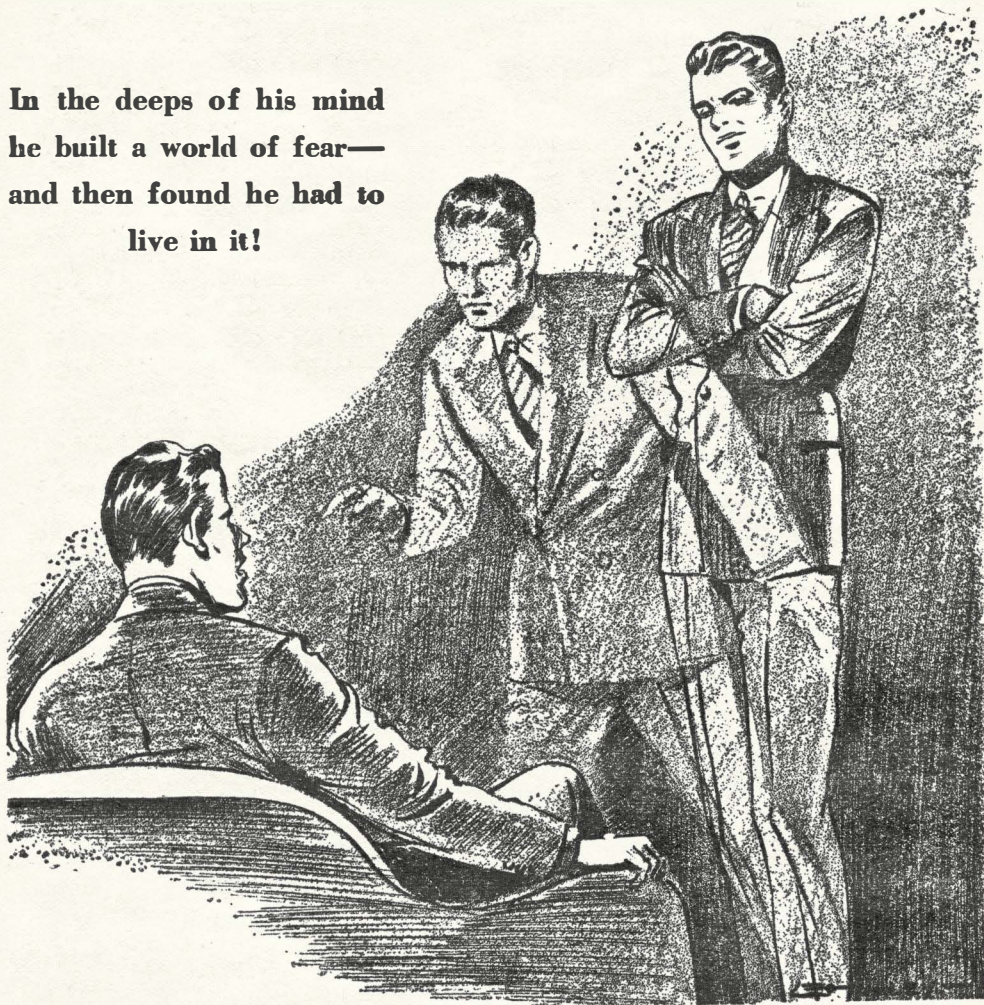
With a tremendous effort, he wrenched away and struck with the knife at the Light of Reason.

Neither of them knew what happened after that.

EXILE

By
EDMOND HAMILTON

In the depths of his mind
he built a world of fear—
and then found he had to
live in it!



I WISH now that we hadn't got to talking about science fiction that night! If we hadn't, I wouldn't be haunted now by that queer, impossible story which can't ever be proved or disproved.

But the four of us were all professional writers of fantastic stories, and I suppose shop talk was inevitable. Yet, we'd kept off it through the dinner and the drinks afterward. Madison had outlined his

hunting trip with gusto, and then Brazell started a discussion of the Dodgers' chances. And then I had to turn the conversation to fantasy.

I didn't mean to do it. But I'd had an extra Scotch, and that always makes me feel analytical. And I got to feeling amused by the perfect way in which we four resembled a quartet of normal, ordinary people.

"Protective coloration, that's what it is," I announced. "How hard we work at the business of acting like ordinary good guys!"

Brazell looked at me, somewhat annoyed by the interruption. "What are you talking about?"

"About us," I answered. "What a wonderful imitation of solid, satisfied citizens we put up! But we're not satisfied, you know—none of us. We're violently dissatisfied with the Earth and all its works, and that's why we spend our lives dreaming up one imaginary world after another."

"I suppose the little matter of getting paid for it has nothing to do with it?" asked Brazell skeptically.

"Sure it has," I admitted. "But we all dreamed up our impossible worlds and peoples long before we ever wrote a line, didn't we? From back in childhood, even? It's because we don't feel at home here."

Madison snorted. "We'd feel a lot less at home on some of the worlds we write about."

Then Carrick, the fourth of our party, broke into the conversation. He'd been sitting over his drink in his usual silent way, brooding, paying no attention to us.

He was a queer chap, in most ways. We didn't know him very well, but we liked him and admired his stories. He'd done some wonderful tales of an imaginary planet—all carefully worked out.

He told Madison, "That happened to me."

"What happened to you?" Madison asked.

"What you were suggesting—I once wrote about an imaginary world and then had to live on it," Carrick answered.

Madison laughed. "I hope it was a more livable place than the lurid planets on which I set my own yarns."

But Carrick was unsmiling. He murmured, "I'd have made it a lot different—if I'd known I was ever going to live on it."

Brazell, with a significant glance at Carrick's empty glass, winked at us and then asked blandly, "Let's hear about it, Carrick."

CARRICK kept looking dully down at his empty glass, turning it slowly in his fingers as he talked. He paused every few words.

"It happened just after I'd moved next to the big power station. It sounds like a noisy place, but actually it was very

quiet out there on the edge of the city. And I had to have quiet, if I was to produce stories.

"I got right to work on a new series I was starting, the stories of which were all to be laid on the same imaginary world. I began by working out the detailed physical appearance of that world, as well as the universe that was its background. I spent the whole day concentrating on that. And as I finished, something in my mind went *click!*"

"That queer, brief mental sensation felt oddly like a sudden *crystallization*. I stood there, wondering if I were going crazy. For I had a sudden strong conviction that it meant that the universe and world I had been dreaming up all day had suddenly crystallized into physical existence somewhere.

"Naturally, I brushed aside the eerie thought and went out and forgot about it. But the next day, the thing happened again. I had spent most of that second day working up the inhabitants of my story world. I'd made them definitely human, but had decided against making them too civilized—for that would exclude the conflict and violence that must form my story.

"So I'd made my imaginary world a world whose people were still only half-civilized. I figured out all their cruelties and superstitions. I mentally built up their colorful, barbaric cities. And just as I was through—that *click!* echoed sharply in my mind.

"It startled me badly, this second time. For now I felt more strongly than before that queer conviction that my day's dreaming had crystallized into solid reality. I knew it was insane to think that, yet it was an incredible certainty in my mind. I couldn't get rid of it.

"I tried to reason the thing out so that I could dismiss that crazy conviction. If my imagining a world and universe had actually created them, where were they? Certainly not in my own cosmos. It couldn't hold two universes—each completely different from the other.

"But maybe that world and universe of my imagining had crystallized to reality in another and empty cosmos? A cosmos lying in a different dimension from my own? One which had contained only free atoms, formless matter that had not taken on shape until my concentrated thought had somehow stirred it into the forms I dreamed?"

"I reasoned along like that, in the

queer, dreamlike way in which you apply the rules of logic to impossibilities. How did it come that my imaginings had never crystallized into reality before, but had only just begun to do so? Well, there was a plausible explanation for that. It was the big power station nearby. Some unfathomable freak of energy radiated from it was focusing my concentrated imaginings, as superamplified force, upon an empty cosmos where they stirred formless matter into the shapes I dreamed.

"Did I believe that? No, I didn't believe it—but I knew it. There is quite a difference between knowledge and belief, as someone knew who once pointed out that all men know they will die and none of them believe it. It was like that with me. I realized it was not possible that my imaginary world had come into physical being in a different dimensional cosmos, yet at the same time I was strangely convinced that it had.

"A thought occurred to me that amused and interested me. What if I imagined *myself* in that other world? Would I, too, become physically real in it? I tried it. I sat at my desk, imagining myself as one of the millions of persons in that imaginary world, dreaming up a whole soberly realistic background and family and history for myself over there. And my mind said *click!*"

CARRICK paused, still looking down at the empty glass that he twirled slowly between his fingers.

Madison prompted him. "And of course you woke up there, and a beautiful girl was leaning over you, and you asked, 'Where am I?'"

"It wasn't like that," Carrick said dully. "It wasn't like that at all. I woke up in that other world, yes. But it wasn't like a real awakening. I was just suddenly in it.

"I was still myself. But I was the myself I had imagined in that other world. That other me had always lived in it—and so had his ancestors before him. I had worked all that out, you see.

"And I was just as real to myself, in that imaginary world I had created, as I had been in my own. That was the worst part of it. Everything in that half-civilized world was so utterly, commonplace real."

He paused again. "It was queer, at first. I walked out into the streets of those barbaric cities, and looked into the people's

faces, and I felt like shouting aloud, 'I imagined you all! You had no existence until I dreamed of you!'

"But I didn't do that. They wouldn't have believed me. To them, I was just an insignificant single member of their race. How could they guess that they and their traditions of long history, their world and their universe, had all been suddenly brought into being by my imagination?"

"After my first excitement ebbed, I didn't like the place. I had made it too barbaric. The savage violences and cruelties that had seemed so attractive as material for a story, were ugly and repulsive at first hand. I wanted nothing but to get back to my own world.

"And I couldn't get back! There just wasn't any way. I had had a vague idea that I could imagine myself back into my own world, as I had imagined myself into this other one. But it didn't work that way. The freak of force that had wrought the miracle didn't work two ways.

"I had a pretty bad time when I realized that I was trapped in that ugly, squalid, barbarian world. I felt like killing myself, at first. But I didn't. A man can adapt himself to anything. I adapted myself the best I could to the world I had created."

"What did you do there? What was your position, I mean?" Brazell asked.

Carrick shrugged. "I didn't know the crafts or skills of that world I'd brought into being. I had only my one skill—that of story-telling."

I began to grin. "You don't mean to say that you started writing fantastic stories?"

He nodded soberly. "I had to. It was all I could do. I wrote stories about my own real world. To those other people my tales were wild imagination—and they liked them."

We chuckled. But Carrick was deadly serious.

Madison humored him to the end. "And how did you finally get back home from that other world you'd created?"

"I never did get back home," Carrick said with a heavy sigh.

"Oh, come now," Madison protested lightly. "It's obvious that you got back some time."

Carrick shook his head somberly as he rose to leave.

"No, I never got back home," he said soberly. "I'm still here."



MESSAGE from MARS

*Out of the far-flung cosmic dust
I saw two pebbles spun:
Moons of Mars! Deimos, the small
And Phobos, the larger one.
Watched their orbits circle brooding Mars
Who stalks your earth today;
Alien dice must vanish then,
If Peace would have her way!*

*Over the surface of dying Mars
My ancient robots crawled,
While sand piled deep where Martians
Slept on while signals called.
Then deadly gas crept down the spires
While a nation passed away;
Two moons that set will rise again
Forever and a day!*

*The ray, the pit, the rocket-car,
The super-brain of Zand,
Vanished as swift as Deimos whirls
Over the red-scarred land.
Fine sand piled deep on iron-eyed beasts
That moved to maim and slay.
Will machines that fell arise again
O Warriors of Today?*

*Lands that waved with gardens green
And music lifting high,
Vast peopled cities with mighty towers
Where rockets flitted by.
Then I beheld the gas drift down,
Death-littered, soft and gray.
The plague that fell can come again,
O Earthmen of Today!*

by Earle Franklin Baker

301101

KNIGHT

STEPPING-STONE TO THE STARS

By
WILLY LEY



REMEMBER the story *F. P. 1 Doesn't Answer?*

It was the story of Flight Platform No. 1, an artificial floating island to be placed in the middle of the Atlantic to receive and refuel trans-Atlantic airplanes. It was not just a science-fiction idea; it was a serious project which originated in the early twenties after a number of attempts at crossing the Atlantic had ended disastrously.

The project was advanced much farther than most people realize. Armstrong in England built a scale model of "F. P. 1" of large dimensions—I believe at the scale of an inch to the foot—and the Germans produced experimental "flight platforms" by anchoring two converted merchantmen in the Atlantic, the *Westfalen* and the *Schwabenland*. Both had been converted into seaplane tenders that effectively serviced the Dornier flying boats that shuttled back and forth between Germany and South American ports.

The prophesy that a full-scale "F. P. 1" would be built soon did seem eminently reasonable in 1931 or 1932, but it did not come to pass.

The large expenditure of capital re-

quired delayed the actual building of such a floating island too long; long-range aircraft were built that did not need a refuelling station in mid-ocean. The Flight Platform became obsolete before it was ever built.

THERE exists a parallel to this story in another field of travel which is completely in the future. This is the idea of the station in space, also conceived in the twenties, and advanced as a necessity with very good and sound theoretical reasons. The station in space, roughly a small artificial moon circling Earth much closer than the real moon, also was designed principally as a refuelling station for spaceships. It was stated that a spaceship leaving Earth would have exhausted most of its fuel supply when reaching an altitude of, say, three thousand miles. If the ship could then be met by a fuel depot things would be much easier all around.

Not only did this sound reasonable; it was, as we'll see later, perfectly correct in every respect. But the calculations which lent all the support to this idea worked with the fuels then known, usually with a mixture of hydrogen and



Is the "Station in Space" obsolete? Maybe not—but very likely it won't be used for the purpose for which it was designed!



oxygen. This mixture is the most powerful chemical fuel. Theoretically a hydrogen-ozone mixture is slightly more powerful, but nobody knows enough about ozone to talk about it sensibly, and it is likely to be extremely dangerous.

But in the meantime atomic fission and the uranium reaction have been discovered. That reaction is, of course, immensely more powerful than any chemical fuel can be.

So far the real "uranium fuel" (U-235) has been extracted from ordinary uranium only in microscopic quantities. Nobody has the slightest idea of a way in which U-235 could be used. But the conviction is strong that U-235 will be the spaceship fuel of the future.

Supposing that this is correct—supposing that soon after the war somebody discovers a commercially applicable method of separating the lighter U-235 atoms from the heavier U-238 atoms and that somebody else finds a way to use them for the propulsion of rocket like machinery—what, then, about the station in space? Will it be as obsolete as "F. P. 1"? Will it be built if there are atomic-powered spaceships that do not really need it?

The answer is still "yes".

The station in space will be built at any event and will be very useful, even if no spaceship setting out for or returning from long voyages will ever need it.

But first it is necessary to explain the theory of the outward station, as quickly as it can be done. The idea was seriously advanced for the first time—some others had toyed with it at earlier dates—by Professor Hermann Oberth in 1923. It was developed by two Austrians, Count Guido von Pirquet and Captain Potocnik, who wrote under the pen name of Hermann Noordung. Both worked separately, with different ideas. The ideas of both are interesting.

The first question is, of course, how such a station could be maintained and why it would not fall down sooner or later. The answer to that is really a problem in ballistics. If a gun is fired perfectly horizontally the projectile describes two different motions at once. It travels horizontally with the speed with which it left the muzzle of the gun—neglecting air resistance and it falls vertically because of gravity. Both motions together produce the well known curved trajectory of a projectile.

A higher muzzle velocity will produce

a longer range, obviously—since the shell can then travel farther before being dragged down. But when the range gets very long another factor enters into the picture. So far we have made the unspoken assumption that the surface of the earth is a plane. We know, however, that it is really spherical. And a sphere curves downward in all directions from any point.

It is clear that, if only the velocity of the bullet is high enough, there will be a point where the downward curve of the spherical earth and the downward curve of the trajectory are equal. Then the bullet would fall and fall—and never reach the surface.

Mathematicians have invented a special name for the velocity at which this phenomenon is bound to occur. They call it the *circular velocity* and it is, in the case of the Earth, almost precisely five miles per second. The next higher step is the so-called *parabolic velocity* or velocity of escape, which, in the case of the Earth, is 7.1 miles per second. This is the velocity that definitely frees a body from the grip of Earth's attraction, the very minimum a spaceship would have to attain.

Even that is not yet quite enough for space travel. The velocity needed to throw the ship into the proper orbit for travel to another planet and several other fuel requirements have to be added.

IT IS obvious that a velocity of five miles per second will be attained sooner than a velocity of 7.1 miles plus. The station in space will be easier to realize than a flight to the moon. There is another complicating factor. The fuel burned in a rocket spends its energy not only in moving the rocket itself, but in moving all the other fuel that is still unburned. If you calculate the necessary amounts for really large rockets, say a spaceship able to carry two men and equipment, you get unbelievably large figures. Such a spaceship, taking off on a direct flight to the moon, would have to discharge forty tons of fuel during the first second. The amount required per second goes down rapidly, but since that amount is required for the first second the rocket motors have to be large enough to handle that quantity. If the spaceship were headed only for a station circling the Earth some six hundred miles above the surface, the amount of fuel needed for the first second of take-off would be only two tons. That simplified

the problem of rocket-motor design greatly. And for taking off from the station the fuel requirements per second are only around four hundred pounds.

These figures are correct for hydrogen and oxygen as spaceship fuel. They will be much smaller for atomic fuels. But, no matter what kind of fuel you assume, the relationship between the various figures must be the same. All of which goes to show that the functions of the station in space and of the platform in mid-ocean are not quite the same. The platform would only have permitted cutting down on the fuel tanks, the station in space permits cutting down on the engine requirements. And that is the most obvious part of its usefulness.

Noordung and Von Pirquet, as I said, had different ideas about the station in space. Noordung placed the main emphasis on a possible feature of that sta-

but for the easiest effort. There had to be such an optimal case for the distance of the station from the surface. Finding it was a question of calculating a series of possibilities, and Von Pirquet was just the man to indulge in such a mathematical spree. His final result is not a station—but three stations!

He has an Inner Station (IS) which madly races around the planet just outside the atmosphere and an Outer Station (OS) which proceeds at a slightly more leisurely pace at a greater distance, connected by a Transit Station (TS) which travels in an elliptical orbit, touching the orbits of both of the others just short of collision at the moments those other two stations pass that connection point of their orbits.

In that scheme, the shuttle rockets from Earth would land on the IS, the passengers would be transferred to the

	Altitude above sea level	Time of one revolution
IS	480 miles	100 minutes
TS	480—3125 miles	150 minutes
OS	3125 miles	200 minutes

Table of orbits of Inner, Transit and Outer Stations, showing intersections.

tion which has not yet been mentioned. If the station circles the Earth at the proper distance it will need precisely 24 hours for one revolution. It would seem to be fixed over one point of the surface, say vertically above the Galapagos Islands—to simplify matters it must be a spot on the equator. The distance required to perform this feat is 35,900 kilometers, about 22,500 miles from the surface. If the station circled at that distance its position would be fixed once and for all; it could easily be found.

But this is the only real advantage of such a great distance. The fuel expenditure and the engine requirements to reach it would be high, even though still far less than those for direct trips to other planets. On the other hand the engine requirements for taking off from the station would be even less than those mentioned a while ago.

Now in any combination of factors there is an optimum, a case where you get the biggest returns not for the least

OS via the TS and the real spaceships would take off from the OS.

All this is at least a few scores of years in the future. But these are not flights of fancy, they are hard-headed mathematical predictions based on all known natural laws.

IT IS a matter of opinion whether such a station will be built in 1980, in 2000 or in 2020 A. D. It is a matter of opinion whether the methods of building it as worked out by Oberth* will be used then or whether somebody may figure out a better way in the meantime. But there can be no doubt that a great number of people with "pull" of all kinds will clamor for berths on that station. Every scientist will want to work there for some time at least, whether he is an ardent supporter of space flight or doesn't give two hoots about the planets.

That station affords opportunities for

*He wanted to throw a spaceship into the orbit and build the station around it.

scientific research that never existed anywhere else. It moves in a vacuum that is emptier than any we can create in the laboratory. And even if by then the better laboratory vacua should be just as empty they will be much smaller.

The absence of air alone is worth any amount of trouble—but something else is absent. Not gravity itself, strictly speaking, but the manifestations of gravity; the station moves around the planet in so-called “free fall”, which means that gravity, while present, does not show itself.

Those interested in the absence of air will be the astronomers and to a certain extent the physicists. Those interested in the absence of the manifestations of gravity will be everybody.

Try to imagine what a radio engineer would give to be able to learn just how electric waves behave in a large vacuum. The radio experts have a fair idea of what they will do, but they'll want to test it. Try to imagine all the experiments a physicist will think up that require either a large vacuum or the peculiar gravitational manifestations (or lack thereof). Certainly biologists will drag amoebas and ciliate balls, frog eggs and pregnant rabbits along. They'll just have to know how large an amoeba would grow without splitting, how ciliate balls would hold together, how frog eggs will develop and what would happen to a pregnant rabbit if the radiations of the sun impinge upon it without the shield of our atmosphere—which is almost opaque to any but visible rays.

Physicists will be interested in these and all other available rays. And chemists will go over all the chemical reactions known to them, starting out with the very simplest of schoolroom experiments. As far as we know gravity has nothing to do with chemical reactions—but if it *should* wield an influence we'd never know about it, simply because we cannot shut it off. The station will answer that question. If it settles it once

and for all by yielding the same results obtained at home, fine. If not, whole chains of new possibilities will appear.

The experiments devised to test the Einstein theory of relativity, which proved inconclusive on earth, can be repeated there with a very good chance for success—and they will probably explode that theory.

But those that will really be happy are, of course, the astronomers. On earth they spend half their time wailing that atmospheric conditions are poor; the air has a habit of getting restless just at the crucial moment. That goes for direct observation as well as for photographic surveys—not to mention the howls of the spectrographers. While the spaceship engineers will show a marked preference for the Pirquet-type station and while all the others will be content with that arrangement the astronomers are likely to clamor for the Noordung station. To them it would combine the advantages of the station in space with the advantages of a fixed observatory on earth.

There is another feature the astronomers will like. Things apparently do not weigh anything; they will need no counterweights for their telescopes. Furthermore, very long telescopes have certain advantages—but on earth they also have disadvantages, due to weight. Out in space only the advantages will be left.

And there is only one reason for not building a telescope that magnifies a hundred thousand times—you could not use it in an atmosphere. That trouble is absent up there. The favorite question of whether there is life in certain craters on the moon or on the plains of Mars will be settled from the station, even before a spaceship ever actually gets to the surface of another planet.

All of which means that the station in space will be built under any circumstances, no matter what the technological development of the future will be like. The opportunities are far too important to be missed.



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THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER

Official Organ of
The Science Fictioneers

THE latest loss from our Advisory Board to the fighting services of nation is Advisor Robert A. Madle.

Private Madle, U. S. Army, was the president of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society almost since its inception seven years ago. He has published numberless fan magazines—one of the latest being the news-weekly, *Nebula*—and has served in some official capacity on most of the large national and international science-fiction fan associations of the past decade.

Our other two Advisors-in-service, incidentally, have already begun the upward trail to glory. Forrest J. Ackerman may now prefix his name with the letters "PFC", standing for Private, First Class; while Milton A. Rothman has attained the exalted status of an acting corporal!

NEWS FROM OUR BRANCHES

The Western Pennsylvania Science Fictioneers, Branch 22 of the international organization, suffers from a problem which no other branch shares. Originally planned as a correspondence club, its members are scattered over a three-hundred-mile area. Meetings would seem to be practically impossible—but listen to the report of their latest one, as told by Director Leonard J. Moffatt.

"Last Sunday a special meeting of the WPSF was held at the home of the club's director. Seven members were present, out of our total of twelve.

"Fan-gabbing and fan-mag investigat-

ADVISORY BOARD

★ Forrest J. Ackerman
Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.

Wilfred Owen Morley

★ Robert A. Madle

★ Milton A. Rothman

Bob Tucker

Harry Warner, Jr.

Olon F. Wiggins

Donald A. Wollheim

★ On Active Service

ing were the main pastimes. It would be impossible to list all the subjects discussed or all the fanzines perused. Whole FAPA mailings were torn apart. Elder told of his life among the weird Slans of Shangri-La (the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, to you). Moffatt's cellophane-covered Paul original was admired by most of the members, except Gilbert. (It's covered with golden cellophane—the pic, not Gilbert.)

"Three members had to leave early, but the remaining four devoured a delicious repast prepared by Mrs. Moffatt, Len's mother. It was *corpus delicti a la worm gravy*, made from Len's own (in) famous recipe. The four ghouls enjoyed their feast.

"Jack Daley is now an Honorary Ex-member, since he is in the Army."

* * *

Short and sad comes a final communication from Paul Carter, director, assistant director, editor, treasurer and entire membership of The Alpha Centaurians, Branch 19 of the Science Fictioneers.

"Announcement:

"Due to the dispersed condition of this branch, our magazine, that paragon of putrescence, that king of korn, *The Screwball*, has suspended publication.

"So has the branch.

"Sad, isn't it?"

The Alpha Centaurians, located in Blackfoot, Idaho, is the group that lost its entire membership, one by one, to other cities, leaving only Director Carter to hold the fort. We're sorry the fort has fallen, and hope that the New Year will bring a brand-new influx of science-fic-

Art Joquel and Morrie Dollens—plus author Ross Rocklynne and his authoress wife, Frances!

"The Fifth Anniversary Issue of *Voice of the Imagi-nation* was distributed, while plans were laid for the monthly issuance of club bulletin, *Shangri-L'Af-faires*. Other fan mags are on the fire by Finn, Chamberlain, Daugherty, Dean, Bronson and Joquel. Refreshments were consumed with relish. The last fan didn't leave till midnight."

* * *

SCIENCE FICTIONEER BRANCHES

Only three members are needed to start a branch of *The Science Fictioneers*. There is no fee involved. Merely send National Headquarters the names of your members (as well as the numbers of their membership cards) and we will send you a charter. When new members wish to join the branch, just see to it that their names and card numbers are sent us after they have been accepted. We also require a copy of your branch constitution and your official minutes.

You'll find a coupon in this issue of *Super Science Stories* which will enable anyone to join *The Science Fictioneers* itself.

tion fans into Blackfoot to restore the branch to its customary live-wire activity!

* * *

Pfc Forrest J Ackerman, whose luck has been the talk of science fiction for lo! these many years, found another instance of it when his Army station turned out to be a bare handful of miles from Los Angeles, his own home town. Able to continue to attend the meetings of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society just as before on that account, Private Forry sends in his account of a recent meeting:

"The pre-Christmas meeting of the LASFS, Chapter No. 1 of the Science Fictioneers, was fortunate in having present two of the organization's Advisory Board Members, in the persons of Milton A. Rothman and Forrest J Ackerman. An exceptionally large gathering, setting a war-time record with 26 present, included such nationally known fans as Phil Bronson, Morojo, Walt Daugherty,

Gordon M. Kull, secretary of the Golden Gate Fantasy Society, Branch No. 14, writes as follows:

"The last meeting of the Golden Gate Fantasy Society was held yesterday. It proved to be a highly enjoyable evening, with the election of officers for the year 1943, discussions of the works of science fiction's top authors, plenty of laughs and, of course, lots of food. (Fans are the biggest hogs!)

"The officers for 1943, unless Uncle Sam calls, are: President, Lou Goldstone; Vice-President, Joe J. Fortier; Secretary, Yours Truly.

"If any of you Bay Area fans—San Francisco, Oakland and vicinity (California, of course)—feel like jumping on the bandwagon, please do so. The more the merrier!

"So come on now, fellows and gals (for we do have a female membership), drop us a line! The address is 1915 Ninth Avenue, San Francisco, California."



“Spacemen are the life of the race, son. They never die. I may be trapped beyond the farthest star—but some day you will find me!”



NEW DAY ON AURORA

By
**STUART
FLEMING**

shoulders great coffers of shining metal, heavy even under the slight gravity of this world. By Herculean efforts they carried them over the tumbled rocks to their ship, and disappeared inside with them.

Then the ship lifted itself upon a tumultuous, bright pencil of fire and was gone, leaving the planet once more lifeless and deserted. The monolith still pointed mutely to the sky, and below it the doorway still gaped invitingly.

THE MEN had come out of the ship, under the strangely harsh glare of alien stars in an airless sky, and crossed to where the battered monolith stood—tiny, crawling mites, raising swift-settling clouds of dust among the crags of the desolate planet.

The monolith was a stark, severe finger of vitreous plastic that pointed forlornly toward the stars from the middle of a seared, denuded plain. Here there had once been soil, and growing things, perhaps; now there was only naked rock, ravaged and lifeless. Beyond were mountains, and at their foot a deep, tortuous chasm that had been a river.

Thick and grotesque in their enfolding spacesuits, the men milled antlike about an opening at the column's base. For a time they seemed to argue, and then, one by one, they filed through the opening and disappeared into caverns below. When they came out, they bore on their

THE DEAD planet swam down toward Steve Kourmas in the visiplate. He watched it intently, handling the submerged keyboard by feel. Behind him the rest of the *Viking's* crew, cushioned in their hydraulic deceleration chambers, were quiet, waiting. Only an occasional cough or grunt broke the silence, or a muttered curse as the pressure drove them deeper into the supporting liquid.

This was the place. The Earth ship *Orion* had left for this dead world seven years ago—and had not come back. Nor had it been reported from any inhabited planet in the Galaxy. They had come here; almost certainly they had reached this planet. The *Orion* was proof against any known danger in flight, and her crew were seasoned spacemen. Her captain—

Strange to think of wiry, brilliant, white-bearded Anton Kourmas as—dead. He was almost a legend: he had been with the Polaris expedition when Steve was seven. He had come back, that time. Steve remembered his own wide-eyed attention as his father's dry, humorous voice told him, "Spacemen are the life of the race, son. They never die, any more than the race dies." But it had been seven years now. They couldn't still be alive.

Then why had he come? Why had he worked and fought his way to the captaincy of this ship, the one he knew would be sent to search for the *Orion*? Why was it that hope for someone you loved stayed alive even when you knew that someone must be dead?

Maybe it was something else Anton Kourmas had said: "Earthmen don't give up, Steve. Do you know why the Polarians died and we came back? They were intelligent, perhaps more intelligent than we'll ever know; they knew they were licked, and they gave up. Well, we knew we were licked too, but we kept on trying."

The wrinkled, keen face with its hypnotic eyes receded, and the visiplat came back. The planet was nearer. There was the monolith again, incongruous in the dessicated waste around it.

Over the muted thunder of the rockets he heard young Kane, recumbent in the tank beside him, speaking into a microphone suspended over his head, recording a running account of the landing.

"Three kilometers up. The monolith is visible again; we are maneuvering to land near it on the assumption that the *Orion* would have done so. No sign of the *Orion*, however. The monolith stands in the center of a large plateau with high mountains to the west and south. It is the only artificial structure visible from space on the entire planet.

"Twenty-five hundred meters. Still decelerating; nothing has happened to us yet. I'll keep on recording at random, in order to establish the exact moment of disaster, if any. There once was a young man named Case, who knocked holes in his ship with a mace. Said he as he died, I submit, sirs, with pride: I have proved you can't breathe out in space! . . .

"Uh—'Alderamin, Cepheus 20X3972, was first mapped in 2092 by Elder and Mauret. Its planetary system consists of three bodies of twenty-nine, fifty-five and one hundred and two kilometers

diameter respectively. Of these the outermost, Alderamin Three, appears to be suitable for reclamation by atmosphere plants and atomic converters and has therefore been incorporated into the *Outline of Colonization*.'

"Two kilometers up. Uh—'Colonization. An expedition sent to make preliminary surveys; however, the *Orion*, captained by Anton Kourmas, failed to return and is assumed to have perished.' That's from the *Reports of the Sol Union Astronautical Society* for August, 3004. From here Alderamin Three doesn't look suitable for reclamation by anything, but that's only your reporter's opinion. Funny thing—I just happened to think: here I am, straining myself to be funny, and if anybody ever plays this back I'll probably be dead.

"Fifteen hundred meters. . . ."

CUSHIONED on its under-jets, the *Viking* sank slowly to rest amid a chaos of vaporized and incandescent rock. Steve watched the danger lights on the board before him and gathered a long breath.

"Well, we made it," said Kane jauntily, and added thoughtfully, "So far." There was a rustle of movement as the men behind them rose from the tanks and detached themselves from their watertight harnesses.

Silently Steve unzipped the membrane from his tank and hoisted his big body out of it. The rest were all out of their tanks and standing for orders: Johnston, second astrogator-pilot; Helmers, engineer; Vanzetti, second engineer; Curtis, gunner; Chung, physician and telepathist; MacDowall, archeologist.

MacDowall was expostulating heatedly with Chung, who was the only one patient enough to listen to him.

"It is all so wasteful! Bang, bang, with the rockets, and up go hundreds of cubic meters of rock; volatilized, destroyed. What if there had been remains buried under that spot? What if we had happened to land on a record block set up by the first expedition? *Phhhht*—another mystery of space!"

"Impossible, that last," Chung said mildly. "We scanned the place carefully before landing on it, in case of just such a one—"

"Don't quibble. Don't quibble. Look at this trip itself—two years wasted in a tank of ice each way. There is no necessity for it: Terra and Alderamin Three

are as close as *that*—” he pressed his bony forefinger and thumb together—“in hyperspace. What are our astrophysicists thinking of? Mauret drive—limited contra-inertia!” He started to spit, then thought better of it.

Steve grinned faintly. “Save it, Mac. Stations, gentlemen. Volunteers for a survey in full armor.”

Kane and MacDowall stepped forward at once. “Right; you two. The rest—”

Unexpectedly, black-bearded Helmars stepped forward, extinguishing his newly-lit pipe against the heel of his hand.

“Doesn’t look like much of a planet,” he rumbled. “May I go along?”

Steve hesitated. “Easy, Ivan. What would we do if we should lose you?”

“Vanzetti could take my place, or you, or even Chung, if he had to. Nobody’s indispensable. Call for a vote.”

Steve shrugged ruefully and acceded. “Get into your armor then. You three will place the record block we prepared before landing; then look over the terrain, keep an eye out for the *Orion’s* block, and approach that obelisk, one man at a time. Get all the information you can about it from a prudent distance, and then come back.”

MacDowall, struggling to get his attenuated frame into armor, looked up with a start. “But—but I want to examine that obelisk. Why the devil do you suppose I asked to go?” he cried.

“You’ll have your chance.” Steve’s jaw knotted abruptly. “But whatever happened to the *Orion* isn’t going to happen to us, if I can prevent it. They didn’t suspect anything, and they undoubtedly sallied out immediately and examined that thing at close range. It’s one of the few things we can be certain they did do. And that’s why you’re not going to do it—not yet anyway.”

The other wilted. “Oh, very well,” he muttered feebly. Then he patted the triangulating spy-ray in his kit and brightened.

The three men, grotesque in lead-coated armor, burdened with sidearms and equipment, shuffled out through the airlock. In a few moments they appeared from under the bulge of the ship, climbed the pit made by the landing, and struck off over the jagged rock toward the monolith.

Frowning, Steve watched them through the visiplat. The leading figure, Kane, bounded cheerfully along, climbing pinacles of rock to get a better view and

then leaping down again. Next came the short, bulky mass that was Helmars, pursuing a stolid course directly toward his goal; and lagging behind was MacDowall, tall and stooped even in his armor. At intervals he stooped to pick up a fragment of rock and then cast it aside. Once he even squatted over an excrescence of igneous matter and took out his pickaxe.

“Mac!” Steve called sharply. “Keep up with the rest. You can dig for bones later.”

MacDowall cast an injured glance over his shoulder and then hurried to catch up. After that the three kept fairly close together—until they had covered half the distance to the monolith.

Then there was an exclamation in the loudspeaker and Kane’s tiny figure went soaring off at a tangent. The other two followed more slowly.

“What is it, Kane?”

A moment’s silence, and then: “I’ve found the *Orion’s* record block. Wait a minute. . . .

“It gives the date of landing, Sol 29, 3001, but that’s all. No exploration data, and no departure date!”

Steve breathed heavily, but said nothing.

Young Kane’s worried voice came back after a pause. “What do you make of it, Steve? Their ship is gone, but they didn’t leave a record. What could have made them leave without posting the block?”

STEVE ran his fingers through his short hair and picked up the spy-ray film for the hundredth time. “There’s a chamber hollowed out underneath it,” he said bitterly. “That could account for a lot. Mac, I’m sending those men to their deaths.”

MacDowall peered over his shoulder, cracking his knuckles nervously. “I wanted to go,” he said petulantly. “It would be worth the risk, well worth it, just to see what’s inside that crypt.”

“Everybody wanted to go.”

MacDowall grunted disconsolately. “More waste. It’s inexcusable, drawing straws for things like this. We ought to have a card file, indexed with each man’s capabilities, and a mechanical sorter. One would think we were still living in the Age of Chaos.”

In the visiplat, the three figures were just climbing the last ridge before the monolith.

Chung’s voice said, “Here we go, Steve. We drew lots among ourselves for pre-

cedence. I go first, then Johnston, then Ivan."

They filed down into the monolith's shadow.

"I'm blasting in the door," said Chung. "There's a lever which apparently opens it, but we're not taking any chances. I will keep talking until something happens to me, and then Johnny and Ivan will tell you what it was, if they can."

"Luck, Chung!" Steve said huskily.

"The door is down. It sank into a slot; I only burned it a little at the edge. . . . There's a ramp leading down. It curves at about twenty meters; the others will have to follow me closely at that point.

"I'm going down. . . . Here's the bend. I can see into the cavern a little, but my flash does not light it up much from here. I can't make out anything. Ready, Johnny?"

"Ready."

"This is it. I'm going through the doorway. It's high, about five meters. The race that built this must have been tall—Uhh!"

Johnston's drawl broke in: "Chung staggered as soon as he got through the door."

"Stay where you are," Steve snapped. "Chung, are you all right?"

"All right," Chung answered slowly. "Something hit me when I stepped over the threshold. Not material—a force-field of some kind, I think. But I'm all right; I feel fine."

"Did you see anything, Johnston?"

"No, Steve. He just lurched suddenly."

"You, Ivan?"

"No."

"Where are you?"

"Just outside the doorway. Shall we go in?"

"Not yet. Watch Chung; report anything unusual."

"I'm perfectly all right, Steve. It wasn't a strong enough field to do anything. It didn't even knock me off my feet. Perhaps it was originally intended as a trap, although I doubt it; but if it was, the power supply has run down."

"What do you see?"

"Not much. . . . There's machinery around the walls, but it's all enclosed and I can't dismantle it alone. There is a passage leading out of the far end. Shall I explore it?"

"No. Wait a minute. . . . All right, explore it. Might as well get it over now. Johnston, follow him in, but stay where Ivan can see you. And be careful!"

"I'm going in," Johnston announced. "Chung's—whup!"

"Johnny staggered too," said Helmars.

"How do you feel, Johnston?"

"I'm—all right. It was nothing."

"You sound queer," Steve barked. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"No, honestly, Steve. It was just as Chung said, just a mild shock."

"Jets on. Just my nerves, I guess. Go ahead; where's Chung?"

"I'M IN the next chamber," Chung said. He formed the words carefully, striving with a tense desperation to betray no hint of the surging emotions that leaped within him. "There are more machines here, all totally unfamiliar. There's dust on the floor. It's been disturbed."

The machines were not unfamiliar. Chung knew with an age-old certainty every detail of their construction, every phase of their functions. It was as if he himself had builded them, he himself thought and planned across the dusty millenia for this day. Out of the confusion of his former life, the certainty of this place was like a bright, joyful flame, searing away all of his doubts and questionings.

The voice came back, as though from far away. "Human footprints?"

He must be careful. "I can't tell for certain. I think so. They lead into another passage. Orders?"

"Oh, damn," Steve groaned. "Go ahead, all three of you, keeping each other in sight. Ivan, report your sensations immediately when the field hits you."

. . . . It was done. Chung let a little of the exultation in his mind seep through into Johnston's. In another instant Ivan, too, would know and be one of them.

That had been incautious. He realized it in a moment of black, feral panic, as he felt an uncertain fear in Ivan's mind and heard his worried voice in the helmet phones.

"Just a minute. I caught a mental impression from somebody just then; it felt like Chung. Some strong emotion, not in Chung's normal pattern at all."

There was a silence from Steve, a silence more dangerous than any sharp demand.

His mind tightly screened, Chung fought to relax the tight clutch of fear at his throat, to think swiftly, lucidly, as he had never thought before. For a mo-

ment his mind whirled kaleidoscopically. What if he should fail now, on the very brink of triumph? Gods of his ancestors! what would be left for him in life, if he should fail? Would he die? No—but some essential thing would be gone out of him. He saw his future before him, the endless searching of a man dead in his soul for something which did not exist, and now could never exist again.

And then, with a sudden clearness, he knew what he must say. The whirling thoughts had occupied only an instant; there was still time.

"I felt it too, Steve. It came from somewhere near—ahead of me, I think. And, Steve—it was a terrestrial thought!"

He waited, breathless.

"Terrestrial—" Steve's voice was trembling with emotion. "Go ahead, all of you."

His mind tightly shielded, Chung smiled.

"Very well," growled Ivan. "Here I go."

There was a silence.

"Well?"

"A nothing," Ivan said. "I hardly felt it."

Quickly, in response to Chung's mental call, Ivan and Johnston joined him in the inner chamber.

"I am going through the doorway," said Chung, staring at the blank wall before him. "Johnny is at the entrance to the second chamber." Mentally, he said, *What we know, the others must know.*

"I can see Johnston, but not Chung," said Ivan. *What about the first expedition?*

That makes no difference, as you know; we can afford to take no chances. Follow my lead. "It is a corridor, with a right-angle bend. Here is a door, sealed. I will have to burn it down."

THE OTHERS were huddled about Steve now, listening tensely, but he did not know it. His grip on the arm of the pilot's chair was cruelly hard; the smooth metal pressed deep into his fingers, but he felt nothing.

There was a tense, cracking silence, and Chung's voice from the speaker: "The door is down."

Another agonizing pause, followed by a sharp, astonishing inhalation, as clear as though Chung stood beside them.

Steve heard his own voice, strange and harsh, saying, "What is it, Chung?" and could not believe that he had spoken.

Chung's voice was awed. "Steve—Kane—Mac— The first expedition. It's here—alive!"

"Alive?" someone croaked.

And then a gush of words came from the speaker: Chung's voice, and then Johnston interrupting, and even placid Helmars chiming in. There was a crypt, vitreous coffins, and inside, the bodies of the *Orion's* crew, with the light of intelligence in their eyes, and feeble, drugged thoughts emanating from their minds.

Alive, alive, alive. . . . The word seemed tremendously important; it dinned in Steve's brain, shutting out caution. He leaped for a spacesuit. His fingers, sealing the helmet, were maddeningly slow, but at last it was done. He turned to the airlock and saw that MacDowall and Kane, behind him, were following his example, while Curtis and Vanzetti hovered undecided.

For a moment he wavered impatiently, his hand on the airlock door. Then he stopped and his hand dropped to his side.

"No," he said. "It won't do. Got to plan."

He looked wryly down at his weaponless belt. "I lost my head for a moment. Somebody should have kicked me."

Young Kane looked surprised. "But, Steve, surely there's no danger now?"

"We don't know. My father—" he choked involuntarily. "My father would never have done what I was about to do—not with the data we have." He crossed to a locker, thrust sidearms into the clips at his belt.

"You two come along, since you've already got into suits. The rest stay here and follow our progress. If anything happens to be, Vanzetti will take command."

Then he was diving into the airlock, not daring to wait longer.

Outside, the dark monolith beckoned across the low, jagged horizon. He forced his body toward it in great, straining leaps, conscious of the others behind him by their heavy breathing.

Alive!

Something struggled at the edge of his consciousness, but it could not form against the strength of that word, *alive*. He thrust it impatiently from him and raced on.

At the last ridge he stopped to take breath. There were vague shouts in his helmet phones. What?

Kane's excited voice, and MacDowall's

peevish whine: "Wait, Steve! Wait, dammit!"

He turned impatiently and saw them struggling to overtake him, stumbling on the rough terrain that had seemed so much mist to him. He felt a sudden pain in his knee and realized wonderingly that he must have fallen, perhaps more than once, and not known it.

What was happening to him? He forced himself to think, and the hidden thought swarmed up from the depths of his mind.

He concentrated on it, fought to make it take form, and suddenly it burst like a bombshell.

He felt sick, as though something had struck him a nauseating, treacherous blow. Kane came up, and then MacDowall. They stopped, peering at his stricken face.

"Vanzetti!" he said, contending with the pain and the mad hatred that welled up inside him.

"Yes, Steve?"

"Use the scrambler—serial 103." He adjusted his own transmitter without waiting for an answer.

"Steve, have you gone mad? This can only mean there's something you want to keep from the others in suits. What—"

"Don't ask questions. I'm still in command; that's what they banked on." He smiled crookedly.

Chung's worried voice was in his ear; he ignored it.

"Look at the spy-ray film. Describe the crypt."

A pause. "Jet's on, Steve; you're the boss. There's an inclined ramp leading down, with a right-angle bend about three-quarters of the way down. Then a doorway, leading into a chamber, just as Chung described it. The chamber is roughly cubical, about twenty meters by twenty by twenty-five. Diagonally across from the outer door is another doorway, leading into a short passage and then into another chamber, smaller, about fifteen meters square by twenty-five in height. Below both of these is a third chamber, about fifty by fifty, with no apparent means of entrance. My guess is there's a trap-door which doesn't show on the film."

"And beyond the second chamber?" Steve gritted.

"Why, nothing. Solid rock. Oh! But Chung—"

"Yes, but Chung," Steve repeated. "That's all. Unscramble." He clicked the dial of his transmitter.

"Chung," he said grimly, "why did you say there was a third chamber beyond the second?"

KANE and MacDowall were staring at him silently.

Chung said, "I don't understand. There is a third chamber. What is wrong, Steve?"

"Then why does the spy-ray film show only solid rock beyond the second chamber?"

There was a short, pregnant silence.

"It must be shielded," Chung cried desperately.

"Chung, listen carefully. These are orders. You have cameras. Take pictures of the members of the *Orton's* crew and bring them up with you, all three of you. Do it now."

"Very well, Steve," said Chung.

And then they waited.

They waited, while a bitter tide of self-reproach surged through Steve Kourmas and drowned the hatred and the pain.

Kane said, "What can have happened to them, Steve?"

Steve answered, from his tortured soul, "I don't know."

MacDowall, quiet for once, had trained his spy-ray on the monolith.

"Here they come," he announced.

They appeared up the ramp, one hooded figure after the other. Chung and Helmars bore between them a great metal coffer, embossed and diapered in strange patterns.

Silently they set it down and stood waiting.

"Where are the films, Chung?" Steve demanded.

Chung held out strips of dark plastic.

"They were clouded," he said. "Radio-activity, I think."

Steve did not move to accept them.

"Clever," he said without emotion. He pointed to the coffer. "And this?"

"One of the coffins, containing a member of the first Alderamin expedition."

"But you said they were transparent," Kane objected.

"The others are," Chung rejoined impassively. "This one became opaque as soon as we removed it from the crypt."

"It's not good enough, Chung," Steve said grimly. "Mac, the spy-ray."

Johnston started involuntarily, but Chung and Helmars remained expressionless.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" MacDowall asked testily. "I've already examined it."

"Well?"

"Round objects, about ten of them. Not a man. . . . Look out!"

There was a gun in Chung's hand; Helmars and Johnston followed suit.

"I'm sorry, Steve, but you must come down into the crypt with us." The pilot beam of Chung's ray snapped on, focused unwaveringly on Steve's chest.

Steve faced him steadily. "Chung, you were once my friend. Put down that gun!"

"For the love that I bear you, Steve, I cannot. You cannot understand now, but we are right and you are wrong. You must come down with us."

"And if I refuse?" Steve demanded.

Chung's face was unreadable. "Then I must kill you."

Desperately Steve dived forward, clawing at his gun. The orifice of Chung's weapon flamed silently red, and behind Steve, young Kane gave one strangled cry.

Then his own ray was out, and Chung reeled back into the doorway of the monolith, clutching the gaping shoulder of his spacesuit. There was a soundless interchange of rays as Helmars and Johnston, off balance, fired wildly and MacDowall replied from somewhere behind Steve. Then the other two dropped after Chung into the doorway, and Steve beside the profane MacDowall, was scrambling for shelter in the lee of a boulder. Steve cast a glance at Kane's limp, huddled figure, and saw that he was beyond aid.

"What do we do now?" MacDowall asked between damns, firing at a momentarily exposed head.

Steve peered cautiously at the doorway. Chung had apparently patched his spacesuit in time, for his helmeted head bobbed into view, a gun in his uninjured hand, and the rock beside Steve's head glowed a vicious red as he ducked. MacDowall fired at another head and drew a cry of pained alarm.

More rays from the doorway concentrated on the upper surface of the boulder, and glowing fragments rained down upon them. In a few more minutes their position would be untenable.

"Make for the ship," Steve decided. Snapping a last ray at the doorway, he broke into a crouching run toward another boulder directly behind theirs. MacDowall reluctantly followed.

In a moment they were over the first ridge and running toward the ship. Steve

looked back as they reached the next rise, but no one pursued them.

Vanzetti and Curtis, who had seen and heard everything, came out to meet them at the airlock, white and shaken.

"My God!" said Vanzetti over and over. "My God!"

"WHAT do we do now?" asked MacDowall again, several hours later.

"Wait," said Steve shortly. "They have air for thirty hours more; after that they'll have to come in."

"We could blast them out with the semi-portables," suggested MacDowall.

"Aside from the fact that they're still our comrades, even though they seem to have suddenly gone mad," Steve replied wearily, "if we should do that we'd never know what we came to find out."

He stared out through the visiplat toward the dimly visible monolith. In the swift, black night of this airless planet it was somehow sinister, foreboding.

Unfamiliar constellations stared coldly down at them; a star was occulted now and again by a murderous, silent meteorite. Suddenly there was movement out on the seared, tumbled plain. Steve leaned forward, straining to make it out.

"What is it?" asked Curtis tensely.

"Something moved."

"Do you think they'll try something?"

"Wouldn't you?"

Silence—then a ruddy flash of light, another, each briefly lighting up amorphous, spacesuited figures.

Steve pressed keys on the console before him; a powerful searchbeam lashed out, swung, steadied on a figure running toward the ship. Another crimson beam flashed behind it; the man staggered, clapped a hand to his side and stumbled on. In another moment he was under the bulge of the ship, hammering weakly for admittance.

Steve swung the beam, caught two other figures, ray guns in their hands. Blinded, they hesitated, then drew back into the darkness.

"It's a trick," said MacDowall.

"Maybe."

"He's wounded," said Curtis.

"Let him in," Steve ordered. "Mac, we'll cover him."

Vanzetti manned the light, sweeping it over a full 180 degrees of arc while the other three, spacesuited, closed the airlock door behind them. As the outer door swung open, a crumpled figure slumped

into the lock. Curtis bent over him, dragged him inside. It was Ivan, his bearded face blue with oxygen-hunger.

Steve and MacDowall lowered their weapons.

"Get that door shut," Steve snapped.

There was a seared, gaping hole in the big man's armor, just under the left armpit. He had tried to cover it with an emergency patch as he ran, but had failed. He was weaponless.

Inside the ship, Curtis tore off his spacesuit and removed the injured man's helmet while Steve held the nozzle of a canister of oxygen under his nose and pressed the lever.

Slowly, a healthy pink washed back to replace the purple of asphyxiation. Ivan opened his eyes.

"Thanks," he said. "I didn't think—I'd make it."

"What happened?" MacDowall demanded suspiciously.

"Get his suit off and dress that wound," said Steve. "We can ask questions afterward."

The engineer's wound was dangerous, but not critical. Skin and flesh over an area of ten square centimeters had been seared away, and two ribs were charred and crumbling where they protruded from the ghastly cavity. When Curtis had removed the frozen blood that covered the wound in great solid gouts, and applied a temporary dressing, Ivan beckoned Steve nearer.

"You've got to capture them," he rumbled weakly. "They don't know what they're doing. Neither did I. That force-field—mechanical hypnosis; but I was the last to go through, and it wore off. When I came to my senses and started back, they tried to kill me."

Steve bent over him tensely. "Do you know what's behind all this? Do you know what happened to the first expedition?"

Ivan nodded, sighed. "Yes. I'll try to tell you—but I'm sleepy . . ."

"I gave him a shot of neophrine," said Curtis. "Better wait till he wakes up."

"How much did you give him?" Steve demanded.

"Two c.c.'s; enough to keep him under for eight to ten hours."

"You're sure he's safe for that long?"

Curtis gestured eloquently. "With that hole in him? Certainly."

"Jets on. Mac, it's your watch. The rest of us will get some sleep and question him in the morning."

They left him sleeping quietly in his cubby, with the pallid light of the stars shining through a porthole on his great, black-bearded face.

STEVE awoke to an uneasy sense of something wrong. Diluted sunlight was streaming through the polarized porthole over his bunk. . . . Over his bunk! Horror-stricken, not yet understanding, he stared at the wall above his head, which should have been the ceiling. Then he felt the steady throbbing of the atomic engines down below and knew with a terrible certainty, that they were in accelerating flight; his bunk had swung upon its cushioned gimbals to face away from the new center of gravity.

He sprang to his feet—but somehow he had not moved. Something restrained him at his first motion, held him down with an iron hand. He looked down.

He was manacled to the bunk.

Presently a man in the tunicked uniform they all wore climbed down the ladder into his cubby. Steve tasted the last dregs of despair as the man turned to face him, and he saw that it was Chung.

For a moment they stared at each other in silence. Chung's features, as always, were impassive. Steve thought he detected in Chung's eyes a gleam of compassion, but he was not comforted.

"It was a trick then," he said at last.

"Yes," said Chung. "Only Ivan could have done it. He fought the neophrine, and then he overpowered MacDowall and admitted us. We have been in space five hours."

"Do you mind telling me where we're going?" Steve asked bitterly.

"No. I am sorry that we could not take you into the crypt so that you could have understood fully that and other things, but we dared not waste the time. We are going to an unnamed star, Cepheus 20z3940. It is the nearest star in this cluster, but it is ten light-years distant; the trip will take long."

"Is that where my—where the first expedition went?"

"In all probability, yes. We hope that they arrived safely with their cargo, but we have no way of knowing, and so we must make the journey ourselves."

"But why?" Steve burst out suddenly.

"Can you tell me why?"

"It is because of the seed," said Chung, as if that explained everything. "So that the Ferein may live again."

"Who are the Ferein?"

"A great and proud and beautiful race," Chung replied softly, "who died with that planet we have just left, Alderamin Three.

"And now," he continued, opening the kit which hung at his side, "I must put you into the coldsleep. Ivan and Johnny are already sleeping; they are both wounded more gravely than I, and so I stand the first watch." He drew out a hypodermic, filled it carefully from a tiny ampule.

Steve struggled wildly, hopelessly, but he was manacled too tightly; he could not prevent Chung from opening his sleeve.

The needle came nearer.

And then he saw an apparition. Up the ladder behind Chung came a wild-eyed, blood-smearred figure still recognizable as Kane, a spanner clutched in its hand.

This was delirium. He turned his face from it in silent agony, and waited for the needle to descend, to write finish to all that he had lived and fought for.

But there was a dull thud and a tinkling on the floor. No needle pricked his shrinking arm.

He opened his eyes wonderingly; Chung was gone from his field of vision, and Kane was still there, swaying a little, the spanner hanging loosely in his hand.

The man who looked like Kane dropped the spanner—it must have fallen upon Chung, for it made no noise—and, gritting his teeth, began to unlink Steve's manacles. Still Steve could not speak.

A ghastly, splintered, dark-brown horn of congealed blood protruded from the ghost's temple; lines of it ran across his cheek and descended from his nostrils; his face was purple with burst capillaries.

"You're alive!" said Steve, as though he still could not believe it.

Kane nodded, and then winced as though the movement gave him exquisite pain. "Damn good thing," he whispered.

The last manacle dropped. Steve rose and stood on the bulkhead beside Chung's inert body, just in time to catch young Kane as he fell. He laid him tenderly on the bunk.

"Pencil-beam," whispered Kane. "Went through my helmet, grazed my skull. Air went out of helmet, but blood went out too. Froze, stopped the hole; saved my life. Great stuff, blood." His voice trailed off, then rose again.

"Saw somebody let Chung, Johnny in-

to ship. Sneaked in just in time. Hid in engine-room cubby; climbed out, came to rescue. Clever, huh?"

And then, quite peacefully, he fainted.

IT WAS three hours since Steve had released the other members of the crew, and for two hours they had been working over Chung, and over Helmars and Johnston, revived from the coldsleep.

"But it's no use," said Curtis, amazement frozen on his lined face. "I've tried hypnotism—what I could—and automatic response; lie-detectors; truth serums: neoscopamine, and even as much *vrenza* as I dared. Each one tells a series of perfectly plausible stories, and no two of them match."

"And all of those stories," Steve said bitterly, "are calculated to keep us from turning back. Did you notice that?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Vanzetti.

Steve shrugged. "Go on, of course."

Nobody seemed to have anything to say.

Chung's voice floated up the passage well. "Steve! Steve! You must listen to me!"

"Pouring it on," Steve said. "What is it that makes them so frantic to get to Cepheus -40?"

"What about those metal chests down in the hold?" Vanzetti asked.

"Mack is down there now, still trying to open them. But he won't. They're made of a metal that our beams won't cut; we can't force the lids because there isn't any purchase, and we'd never hit on the combination of those locks in a thousand years."

Steve rose abruptly and strode to the porthole. "Everything is like those locks," he grated. "It's like a puzzle put together in the fourth dimension; alien, all of it, even the crazy logic that holds it together."

He turned toward them. "Do you know what Chung told me was in those coffers, when he thought it didn't matter what he said to me? Seed. Seed. But don't try to extrapolate from that, because you'll be wrong. The answer to all these questions is buried with the ashes of the race that built that monolith—unless it's waiting for us, where we're going."

Curtis had been watching him intently. He stepped forward, "Careful, Steve; you'll crack up."

Steve looked at him in surprise, and

then smiled wearily. "No, I won't," he said simply. "I can't. There's something inside me—you don't know. It stopped me once before when I almost spilled the apple cart, and it won't let me break now. I could use a sedative, but I've got a year and a half of the Sleep ahead of me, and there's nothing better than that."

Curtis grinned back slowly. "Jets on and blasting, Steve; you're still the boss."

He turned as MacDowall swung himself up into the control chamber.

"No luck," said the archeologist before Steve could speak. "Good technicians, those—what did Chung call them?"

"Ferein," Steve told him, biting the word savagely.

"Of course, Ferein; Ferein. *Hmmm.*" He rubbed his bruised skull reflectively. "Pity we haven't anything to give us a line on what they were like. Nothing but the engravings on the coffers. Do you know, I spent half the time I was down there staring at those damned designs?"

"I'm not surprised," Vanzetti murmured.

MacDowall ignored him. "They're beautiful Steve. There's something in them that I've never seen before in the decorations of any non-human race. Never."

Steve stared at him. "What are you getting at?"

"Nothing, maybe. Just that I think the Ferein were manlike, not monsters like the Polarians or any of the other races we've met and exterminated since Lowe's rocket. I don't see them fitting into the pattern that's building up. That's all. I don't draw any conclusions yet; I keep an open mind."

"So do I," said Steve.

"Of course; of course. . . . How's Kane?"

"Under the Sleep," Curtis answered. "It's the best thing I or anybody could do for him now. He'll be all right, except that his face will be scarred until he can get home to a plastic surgeon."

"Good. Good. Well, whose watch?"

"Mine," Vanzetti told him. "I'll put the rest of you under any time you like."

One by one, Steve last of all, they drifted off to their bunks, and, under Vanzetti's needle, into the dreamless Sleep. The ship bore on, its mighty engines driving it tirelessly forward, while the wheeling galaxies marked off the passing of weeks and months, and one yellow dwarf star singled itself out from

the myriads ahead, and grew slowly, inexorably larger.

ONCE AGAIN the great ship, shining in the light of yet another alien star, dropped down toward the disc of a planetoid, the innermost of eight. The others, giants in comparison with this one, were cold, ammonia-methane worlds, too far from their primary for life. In contrast, the first planet looked as Alderamin Three might have looked in its youth: a clear, oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, tenuous by Earth standards, but life-giving; for the green of vegetation spread across its broad continents and made its myriad islets a stipple of color across the face of its oceans.

Steve stared at its inverted image suspended above him, his heart pounding with an urgency he had never felt in other landings. When Curtis had awakened him from the Sleep he had felt refreshed, his nerves calmed and steadied since his last conscious moment. But now that the journey was almost done, all the old anxiety came stealthily back, making his sturdy knees tremble with unaccustomed nervousness, blurring his eyes unaccountably. He shook his head impatiently and the planet steadied, came into focus.

What was he hoping to see? Why had Chung and the other two, still in irons and protesting complete recovery, started the *Viking* on this mad journey across the abyss from one lone outpost of matter to another?

The image grew, swung slightly. Hardly realizing what he did, Steve corrected the flow of mighty energies his fingertips controlled, centered the swelling planet once more.

Down . . . down. . . . Was there to be nothing but continents and seas, and featureless greenery?

There! Just down the horizon, a glint of reflected light. His tense fingers stabbed down on the console, swung the ship in a bone-crushing bank toward the place where that tiny glint of light had been.

Beside him, Vanzetti grunted harshly. Steve could sense the other's uneasiness, but neither spoke. There was no time nor breath for conversation.

The atmosphere piled up around them as they arrowed down. A soft sibilance, almost too low for hearing, mounted swiftly into a whine and then a fierce scream of wind. Then he saw the light

again and he braked their fall swiftly.

Even as it was, they would pass over it. It went past them, far below, too swiftly for close observation, but Steve caught a glimpse of a tall new city, with wide, curving streets encircling clusters of slim, Crystal towers.

That's it, he wanted to say, but he could not form the spoken words, could not bring himself to speak; he could only fight the controls, bringing the ship around in a tight, straining arc, braking its speed to bring it back to that shining city.

There were factories clustered about the outskirts of the city, cubed, compact structures, exhaling their almost invisible waste gases far from the residential centers.

Farther in there were spacious parks, and great bare spaces that might be intended for landing fields, then comfortably separated homes, all in an architecture of strangely beautiful curves and angles. Then the crystal towers appeared, grouped in ever-increasing height and beauty around a slim central spire that was the hub of the city. The other towers hid it from Steve as they came up, but he could see that it was a deep amber color, in contrast to the untinted purity of the others.

Then they were directly over it, soaring on their airfoils, and Steve had no eyes for the colorful throngs that surged in the central square, faces upturned to follow their flight—for huddled in a kind of cradle at the base of the amber spire was, unmistakably, the *Orion*.

And embedded in that clear amber—dear God, what were those dark, sinister shapes?

He whipped the *Viking* into another narrow turn, fighting for altitude.

"Adjust the viewpoint," he gritted to Vanzetti as they came into position again. "Telescopic."

Vanzetti's swift fingers magnified the image, brought the inverted spire so near it looked almost within reach. So near. . . .

There was no mistake. The enormity of it numbed him for long, immeasurable moments while he kept the ship automatically circling the spire—but it was true. There were eight of the dark shapes, spaced with mathematical exactness from top to bottom, embedded like bugs in plastic—the corpses of the crew of the *Orion*.

HE HAD not thought, he told himself dully, not even in his worst nightmares, to see the topmost figure's white beard thus, cloudily through amber crystal, like a mounted specimen. Even if his father had been captured by some savage race and they had put his head upon a pole, his long beard matted with the filth they had flung at him, that would have been bearable. But this—

And then, suddenly, a red curtain snapped down over his vision, and he heard his raw voice shouting orders.

"Curtis! Man your guns!"

He heard a stifled gasp, but in a moment the reply came steadily: "Guns manned."

Steve whipped the ship about again. "Raze the city."

"Steve—"

"Raze the city!"

The pale white pilot beams of the *Viking's* port and starboard batteries lashed down, and where they touched, black destruction trailed its way across the massed buildings. For a moment, as they went over, Steve saw the milling crowds pause in horror. When he had turned back, the last of them were disappearing swiftly into the buildings, leaving only their dead.

The rays flicked off.

"I can't do it, Steve," said Curtis harshly. "It's mass murder."

Steve twisted in impotent rage in the confining deceleration tank. "Didn't you see?" he cried furiously. "Didn't you see what they did to those men?"

"Yes, but that doesn't prove—"

"Imbecile! MacDowall, man the guns!"

There was only a slight pause. "No, Steve."

And Curtis: "You'd better set her down and let us talk it over."

Blindly, Steve turned the ship back over the city. "Are you both mad? Can't you understand—"

The *Viking* heeled over abruptly, and three closely-grouped red danger lights winked on on the instrument panel. Steve banked automatically and saw the pale beams reaching up from the ship at the base of the amber spire.

"They're raying us from the *Orion*!" he cried. "Curtis!"

The beams swung nearer again, and he accelerated wildly to avoid them.

An instant's hesitation, and the *Viking's* rays flared down again, groping for the ship below. For a moment they grazed its hull, leaving crumpled, incan-

descent metal, and then swung wide as Steve frantically maneuvered to dodge the *Orion's* battery.

"Got one of their forward guns," said Curtis. "They aren't shielded." He grunted as Steve looped suddenly out of the way of a beam. "Oh-oh. Look!"

A group of tiny figures in a central square near the grounded ship had trundled out a shining deadly mechanism and were training its huge orifice on the *Viking*. A scintillating violet beam leapt out, missing them by scant meters. Steve dodged, only to run foul of a ray from the *Orion*. The ship nosed over violently.

"Port drive rocket gone," Steve announced in a voice drained of emotion.

"Has it struck anyone as odd," asked MacDowall, "that they haven't any fixed armament?" But no one heard him.

Inexorably the *Orion's* batteries closed in, forcing them to lose more and more altitude. A lucky shot by Curtis silenced half a battery, and another incinerated the mobile unit's crew; but the gun itself was unharmed and another group had it in action again in thirty seconds.

Weaving erratically from the uneven drive of the four remaining jets, the *Viking* blundered into another beam, and yet another. And then, inevitably, it stalled in the middle of a loop. The violet beam struck home.

Steve was conscious of a thunderous clang, like the blow of a giant's hammer on a steam boiler; he saw the hull of the control chamber crumple like paper, and watched, with a curious detached horror, as the image in his visiplat tilted crazily up and up.

So it's really happened. This is the finish, after all, he thought.

The silence was suddenly startling, as the remaining jets cut out. With agonizing slowness the low whine of wind in the gaping rent in the hull built up to a scream. He caught a fleeting, kaleidoscopic glimpse of the ground rushing up to meet them, and then the *Viking* crashed.

NARA of the Ferein gazed sadly out over the ruins of the city in the gathering twilight.

"Our fathers did not anticipate this," he said aloud.

Give yourself peace, came the thought of his companion, Lex. *The fault was not theirs; nor is the damage too great. All will be well with us now—and with them.*

Nara turned and smiled at her affec-

tionately. *Have you examined their minds?*

Yes. Little is to be learned from the ones who were hypnotized, or from any of the others, except their leader, Steve. It was he who ordered the destruction of the city, and his thoughts, in sleep, are chaotic.

He should be conscious by now. Shall we go in?

Nara linked his arm in hers and, fastening their respirators, they entered the improvised airlock of the hospital ward.

Cradled in the great downy Ferein bed, Steve's battered body, already half-healed, was stirring, almost awake.

They are strange people, Nara thought. *The upper jaw fixed, the lower mobile. . . He looks somewhat like the other, the white-haired one.*

His son, answered Lex briefly.

Nara sighed softly. *Ah! That explains much.*

Steve's eyes fluttered slowly open. In the subdued light of the room he saw the two tall, green-skinned creatures standing over him. Both were clean-limbed and graceful; both were made subtly monstrous by the masks of their respirators. He felt the dull ache of scarcely-healed wounds, and glared up at the two in hopeless defiance.

Thought-images crept into Steve's mind.

A fair, green world, swimming slowly around its life-giving parent star: Alderamin Three. An ancient, mature race; great shining cities that were poems in crystal. Science; the arts; machines that worked endlessly without attention, releasing men from their age-old slavery; war and dissention things of dimly-remembered history, for the race had ages ago achieved telepathy, and with it, complete understanding.

Eons passed. The warm, beneficent sun grew cold; atmosphere escaped from the planet's slight gravitational field. Hastily, then desperately, the tall green-skinned race worked to find a way to escape the end of their cycle. Space-flight. No—the other two worlds in their system were too small, too close to the sun. Their atmosphere was long gone; they were seared, lifeless sepulchers. And in the remaining time, they could not hope to build spaceships that would take them to another star.

One slim chance was left to them. They could not survive the death of their planet but their children might. Their

egglike ova, in suspended animation, they encased in a monolith so bulded that it would endure for countless millenia. In all that time, perhaps some race that had solved the problem of inter-stellar flight would reach their dead world. This was their only chance to insure that all their struggle, up from the streaming jungles of their primordial youth, should not have been in vain.

Inside the monolith, with the genius born of their desperation, they erected a mechanism that would keep watch over their future through all the ages to come. Whenever an intelligent being should enter that monolith, the machine would awake and impress upon the cells of his brain the inescapable necessity, strong as the instinct of survival itself, to take the ova to another star-system, where they could live again. This they did, and then, with resignation, and with hope, they died.

After unguessable millenia, the million-to-one chance came to pass: eight human beings from far Sol had landed upon the dessicated planet, and obeyed the commands of the machine. They had carried the seed, as much of it as they had room for, to this green young planet of another star; here they had brought the ova to life and carefully nurtured them until the swift-maturing beings could care for themselves. With machines and telepathic records brought from Alderamin Three, they had helped them to build their shining new city, and to start again the interrupted chain of their civilization.

And then, Steve's thought welled up bitterly, *the glorious Ferein killed them!*

No! came the startled, horrified thought. And then the pictures again:

The Earthmen had not enough fuel left to return to their home planet, and

they were unable to synthesize more. There was an element in the air of this planet, essential to the Ferein, but deadly to them. What was the Earth word—*radon*? They knew that another expedition would follow to discover their fate. And so, with their full consent, the Ferein had put them into suspended animation, and sealed their bodies into chambers in the amber spire at the hub of the city, a monument of gratitude to their deliverers.

Now that the second expedition was come, there would be enough fuel to take some of them, at least, back to their home planet. And another ship could come from Earth to take back the rest.

"My father? Alive?" Filled with incredulous, numbing hope, Steve sat up in the bed, scarcely feeling the pain that lanced through him at the abrupt motion.

Yes. He should have been revived by this time. Nara, bring the white-haired one.

And then, after a tremulous eternity, one of the green-skinned ones was coming back through the soft, hazy light with another, remembered figure, and the calm, white-bearded face was smiling down at him with the old quiet affection.

"Father . . ."

Lex and Nara strolled once more to the portal, overlooking the glowing, pastel city. Stars were coming out, one by one, in the violet-black of the sky.

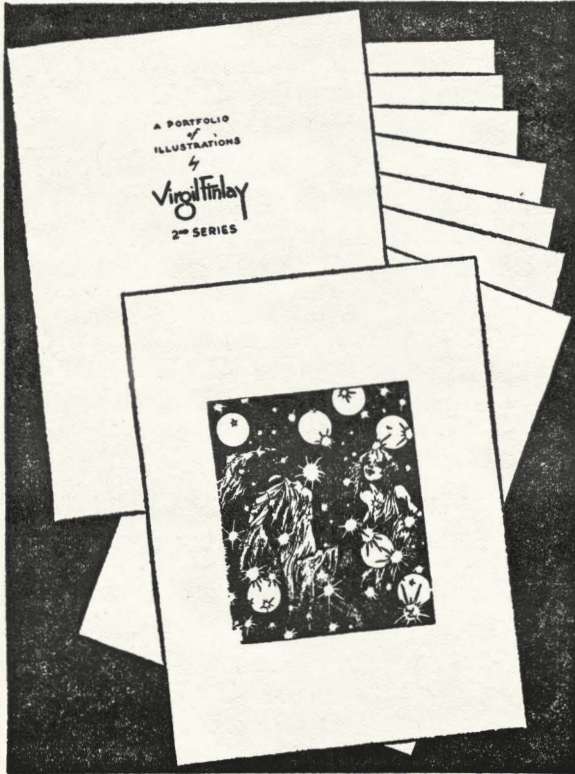
Nara flexed his arms and breathed deeply of the night air. *Aurora*, he thought affectionately. *Anton did well in naming our world after the dawn-goddess of his race. Tomorrow—*

—Is truly a new day, came Lex's soft thought, complementing his own.

And then for a long while they were silent.

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Super Science Stories, published quarterly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1942. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Super Science Stories, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, 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, Fictioneers Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Fictioneers Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Popular Publications Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 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: 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; and 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. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager, Sworn to and subscribed before me this 20th day of October, 1942. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 18, Register's No. 4W359. (My commission expires March 30, 1944.) [Seal]—Form 3520—Ed. 1933.

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(Continued from page 6)

unrationed, I'll never turn my hand to anarchy.

In your February issue, E. E. Smith's story could have done with a lot less fantasy and a lot more science. However, Henry Kuttner's *Thunder in the Void* had plenty of the right kind of kick; let's have more of him. And, by the way, why does everyone save all their brickbats for Ray Cummings? I think he is the master in the field of his type of S. F. stories. So wishing *Super Science* continued success, I will close,

Cordially yours,

Alexander Price

P. S. Dear Editor:

In regard to a letter in *Missives and Missiles* in your February issue, submitted by Darwin Kellogg Pavey of New Orleans, La., as I was very interested in it and very desirous of writing to him for old times sake. I would appreciate it greatly if you would be good enough to inform me if possible, of Mr. Pavey's present mailing address. If you cannot, perhaps you could tell me the proper way to obtain this information. Enclosed please find stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply.

Yours respectfully,

Alexander Price

Kid stuff, huh? That was our title, too!
Dear Mr. Norton:

Many, many thanks for the return of Arthur Leo Zagat. *Sunward Flight* is a wild, unrestrained "Space Story" such as has not been seen for a long time. It takes first place. So, coincidentally, does Paul's drawing, in the illustration bracket.

The Fear Planet (ugh, what a title—kid stuff)—gets second place. Bloch can write so well that one is obliged to burrow into a bucket of sand; yet he can also turn out humorous material that is *funny*—and I don't mean whimsical. Odd combination; maybe he's the original Doctor Jekyll.

The Persecutors third. All were excellent, this time—a welcome change.

Paul Carter

We wish it were a daily, Jay!

Nov. 26, 1942

Dear Editor:

Oh why doesn't your mag come out any oftener? Then both come out about a week apart—why—why—why???

Why doesn't your mag have an editor's page? I consistently enjoy one in another mag. Gives ye ed. a chance to fume!

I took one look at the drawing (Tho it's sheer artistry) for Zagat's story—*Sunward Flight*—and said, "My bottom (always deal from the bottom) dollar that was drawn by Paul!" an' it was. That fellow's got something; he MAY go far in s.f. drawing (loud laughter).

1. *For Sale—One World*—I just love these ('twasn't any respect for Rocklyne—tho I do like his stories, it was just that this story was so good it yelled for first) yarns, and this one yells for a sequel (in fact me and the story BOTH yell for said sequel).

2. *The Persecutors*—I didn't care for the ending, too unsatisfying—what DID happen to the world? Well written tho.

3. *Sunward Flight*—Paul's superb drawing (tho the story described the dome larger than Paul depicted it—in relation to the men anyway) saved it from a lower place.

4. *Garments of Doom*—Nice short—interesting—no more—no less.

5. *War God's Gamble*—Terrible blurb—"he could not win honestly and he could not cheat"—Oh brother . . . when markin' cards ain't cheatin', I'll play you a game of anything . . . (with MY cards.)

6. *Fear Planet*—I read it—it was not too bad—but . . . lets have less an' less of that type (or DO I mean tripe?).

7. *Circle of Youth*—last . . . and I accorded it the honor of readin' it first . . . ah me!!! (Still can't believe C. didn't write it.)

ARTWORK

1. Paul—on pages 82-83.

2. Work of bashful artist (can't locate the name) on 28 and 29.

3. Cover—by Finlay.

Others ordinary—with one exception . . . For the *Circle of Youth*, on pages 72 and 73. In this delightful creation (from which it appears, the artist wisely withheld his name) we see our dashing hero, dressed, in light clothing, carrying (no less) an automatic pistol.

Now far be it from me to be a spoilsport, but isn't that a bit ridic? Isn't it likely (I only say likely) that it would be VERY cold so far from the sun as a Neptunian moon. The girl too is lightly dressed (an understatement—but then a space-suit WOULD spoil some of that—shall we say oooooomph?)

As to the automatic I won't bother . . . it's too painfully obvious that a man with a space ship SHOULD have at least a common sizzle-gat.

As I said, the hero is dressed in light clothing . . . an' that includes out an air helmet.

Please tell me, Mr. Norton, Sir, how the poor egg breathes?

The drawing itself is really O.K., outside of what I mentioned.

If the author OR artist wish to undertake to explain these little inconsistencies, I shall be most happy to listen—how 'bout it?

That's all I guess an' since it's so long, you have my permission to delete any part of it.

Thine—

Editor's little helper
Jay Chidsey
Green Springs, Ohio

Dazed for days!

Dear Mr. Norton:

The original shock of perusing the February *Super Science* has had me dazed for days. Am still partially flabbergasted. Why? The issue is actually excellent in all respects, something that sets it apart from other SSS numbers . . . and most of the rest of the prozines. Let's hope that this is no ephemeral flash of brilliance.

Generally speaking, this issue might be equated to Norton, divided by Cartmill, differentiated to the second degree of Finlay, plus good fiction, Paul, Dolgov and Knight, and plus *Fantasy Reviews* raised to the third power. Solve the equation and there it is.

But, to get more specific about each quantity:

The fiction is, naturally, the most important and therefore the item that has had to show the greatest improvement. It has! Cartmill's yarn, *The Persecutors*, could have buoyed up the rest of the issue alone, if it had been necessary. Not that it was, though, for the other tales also had quite a few points in their favor. But to get back to the point: among the ranks of SSS fiction, *Genus Homo* and *Lost Legion* have received dazzling smiles of approbation from my direction. And yet, neither has gotten one of quite as great an intensity as that bestowed recently on *The Persecutors*. Which apparently means that I like it quite a bit. It's unusual—strikingly so—for even science-fiction, with a pattern woven of superb story-telling. Therefore, *Skool*—to Cartmill for his magnificent job, and to you for the not unimportant point of printing it.

For *Sale*—*One World* and *Sunward Flight* would have received considerable attention, even a year or more ago, when *Super* was beginning its upswing trend. As it is, they're both still good, but pale upon the probably unfair, but unavoidable comparison with *TP. Garments of Doom*, *War God's Gamble*, and *The Fear Planet* follow on the ratings as being uniformly good, while the other two stories are just fair. All in all, a notable success with no tale of poor or mediocre standing, and with one of really "super" quality.

Art. Finlay's present cover is his best for you to date. The usual bug-eyed monster is prominent, true, but this happens to be one of those rare cases of alien portrayal (tho not rare for Finlay) that has turned out right. Beautiful. As is Paul's interior pic for Zagat's tale . . . a brilliant piece of complexity, exactness, and symmetry that only he can achieve. Hmm, 'sa shame such stuff is stacked away in some recess of Ye Editor's Den. That a broad enough hint? To get back, Dolgov seems a suitable substitute for Bok from my viewpoint, for he uses a similar style with much the same degree

of success. Lawrence, and Knight too, are fairly good, while Morey lurks about as the one drawback. Very good stuff in general, particularly in comparison with the old SSS.

Features. *Fantasy Reviews* is the best by far, containing good material and interesting news on several angles. Not dated either, even with quarterly appearance. *Per se*, as a devotee of the literate kangaroo, I await the *Pocket Book of Scientific Romances* with considerable interest.

Readers' columns are doing quite nicely of late, tho a few more words from your general direction might not be amiss. *Science Fictioneers* is suffering a scarcity of items, but that is mainly due to the war . . . and can only be remedied by all of us.

Cushlamochree! Enough, don't you think?

Sincerely,

Bill Stoy

Come in and meet the boys, Landis

Dear Sirs:

Please accept my membership to your organization, "The Science Fictioneers." I am an ardent reader of science fiction and wish you would tell me if there are any members of your club in San Diego, as I wish to correspond or talk to any serious fans.

I have never paid much attention to *Super Science Stories* until I saw the swell cover on the February issue. I'm sold if you keep Finlay. I was quite surprised when I read that Popular Publications have purchased *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. The magazine will be super if you keep the old artists, Paul and Finlay and I hope the never-before-printed classics turn out to be classics. Before I end this letter I wish you would tell me if E. E. Smith will write any short stories for your companion magazine *Astonishing Stories*.

Sincerely yours,
Landis Everson
548 Marina Ave.
Coronado, Calif.

Missouri's gift to science fiction

Editor, *Super Science Stories*,
205 E. 42nd Street,
New York City

Dear Mr. Norton:

What can I say? Mr. Kuttner floors me. I'm flabbergasted. I find that he is absolutely right, and I am wrong (it says here). But I'll concede every point to Kuttner's favor, as I'm anxious to forget the whole smelly affair.

Getting down to the February issue—wotta cover! If the BEM had been done by anyone but Finlay, it would have been ludicrous, but Virgil gave it just the touch it needed. The girl and machine are nice, as are the oldsters in the

(Continued on page 125)

FANTASY REVIEWS

"Deliver Us from Evil", a play in three acts by George Makaroff, adapted from the story, **"Viy"**, by Nicolai Gogol. Produced under the direction of William Boyman with Robert Speaker, Bette Doyle, Polly Reardon, Leonard Yorr, Jack Blair and Helen Wagner. Presented at the Theater Showcase, New York.

Viy is a legendary Russian iron-faced devil who was popular with the peasants about 1840, the year in which this play is laid. The scene is a kitchen in the farmhouse of Dorosh, where Foma Brut, a student priest, stops on his way to Kiev. After hearing a lot of talk about devils and witches, one night Foma wakes up to find a witch in the kitchen. She is a tiny, horrible old thing who proceeds to climb on his back and drive him out into the night.

When he returns the next morning with the story of how he managed to climb on her back and beat her into unconsciousness in a gully, the peasants are horrified. The woman they found dying in the gully is the beautiful wife of the Sotnik, the lord of the estate.

The Sotnik's wife, with her dying breath, requests that Foma be the one to read prayers over her in church for two nights. Foma does. Toward dawn the corpse comes to life and menaces him in a hellish dance, until the crow of a rooster sends her back to her coffin.

The second night he brings a gun, but when he shoots her she becomes triplets. The dance becomes frenzied, as drums beat and spirits cry in the wind outside the church. From without there come heavy footsteps as the devil Viy approaches. Foma is saved from madness only when a peasant girl forces a rooster to crow at two in the morning.

On the whole the play is undistinguished, though the two scenes in the church are splendid ghost-and-ghoul fantasy. The choreography, by Liljan Espenak, is superbly horrible.

"The Skin of Our Teeth", a play in three acts by Thornton Wilder, with Tallulah Bankhead, Frederic March, Florence Eld-

ridge, Florence Reed and Montgomery Clift. Presented at the Plymouth Theater, New York.

The most provocative play to hit Broadway in many a season, **"The Skin of Our Teeth"** is a fantasy field day, cramming 500,000 years into the lifetime of one Mr. Antrobus, his family and Sabina, a serving wench.

Primeval man, the Ice Age, dinosaurs, the Flood and the time after this war are variously set forth, in a dizzy and often hilarious evening.

Mr. Wilder has used many of the tricks of **"Hellzapoppin'"** to put his fable across, but it also has deep meaning.

Mr. Antrobus represents the average man, who, having survived the Ice Age, Flood, pestilence and wars by the skin of his teeth, is still able to stay on his feet and keep turned in the right direction.

The acting is excellent all around and Elia Kazan's direction and Albert Johnson's sets are compelling. Don't miss this fine comedy.

"Cat People", an RKO Radio picture with Simone Simon, Kent Smith, Tom Conway, Jane Randolph and Jack Holt.

This exhausting film deals with an old Balkan legend which has Simone Simon scared to death. She's always just about to claw someone to death, and doesn't like the prospect. The fantasy-film fan will probably sit through it just to see what his screen world is coming to, but he's going to develop a grudge against RKO.

"Mr. Sycamore", a play by Ketti Frings, based on a story by Robert Ayre, presented by the Theatre Guild at the Guild Theatre, New York, with Stuart Erwin, Lillian Gish, John Phillip, Enid Markey and Otto Hulett.

An interesting but not exciting play, **"Mr. Sycamore"** tells of John Gwilt, a postman tired of twenty years of work, who decides to leave the world of human beings and become a tree. Influenced by the legend of Philemon and Baucis, he

really plants himself in his back yard.

After a while he takes root and is changed into a stately sycamore. That's about all there is to it, just a quietly humorous and sometimes dull play about a small town and its arboreal postman.

Stuart Erwin, in his Broadway debut, and Lillian Gish gave appealing performances. The supporting cast was uniformly good.

Evidently too quiet for New York, "Mr. Sycamore" closed after a brief run.

"R.U.R.", a play in three acts and an epilogue by Karel Capek, translated by Paul Selver. Produced under the direction of Les Strasberg, with Hugo Haas, Sydney Smith and Edith Atwater. Scenes by Boris Aronson. Presented at the Ethyl Barrymore Theater, New York.

Familiar to all, now, is Capek's story of the robot dictator, Radius, who revolts against his human masters, gathers a legion of soulless metal men about him and treads a bloody trail of destruction through Europe. It receives sympathetic presentation in this latest revival, the first in thirteen years in the United States. The producers have managed to refrain from drawing too obvious a parallel between the soulless robots who overrun Europe in the world of fantasy and the soulless Nazis who have overrun it in the world of brutal fact. Yet some of the phrases in the play might have come over your radio any evening, from the lips of your favorite news commentator.

The play is now more than a score of years old, and it bears the mark of age. Architect Alquist, who, as head of the factory which makes Rossum's Universal Robots, unleashes destruction upon the world, seems rather tedious and wordy in the speeches he makes. On the whole, the robots appear to better advantage than the men and women. They, at least, are expected to be stiff and stilted.

The "happy" ending comes when, after all humans are destroyed and the robots discover they are wearing out and have lost the secret of their manufacture, a male and female robot re-discover biology and set out to build a new world. It falls a trifle flat.

The sets are attractive, though restrained.

"R.U.R." was one of the first genuine science-fiction plays. As such, it's worth seeing, if only to see what strides the field has made since. As the terror play it was originally intended for, though, it seems singularly namby-pamby in these rugged days.

"I Married a Witch", a Cinema Guild picture, released through United Artists, with Fredric March, Veronica Lake, Robert Benchley, Cecil Kellaway and Susan Hayward.

You will enjoy this film adaptation of the novel, "The Passionate Witch", by Norman Matson and the late Thorne Smith. It is one of the wackiest pieces of fantasy yet to be screened, and the acting is excellent.

Veronica Lake plays the part of a witch named Jennifer, who, with her sorcerer father, was burned in New England 270 years ago and buried beneath an oak tree.

Lightning finally liberates the two and they set out to bedevil Wallace Wooley (Fredric March), who is running for governor. He has the misfortune to be a descendant of the Pilgrim Wooley who exposed them way back when and against whose descendants they have sworn a vendetta.

After Jennifer has assumed human form, the plan is for her to administer a love philtre to Wooley, thus causing him no end of unhappiness and the witch and sorcerer no end of revenge.

Unfortunately for their plans, Wooley accidentally gives the philtre to Jennifer, whereupon complications develop thick and fast.

Cecil Kellaway is marvelous as the sorcerer and Veronica Lake gives an ingratiating performance as the witch. Benchley is, as always, too scarce.

March, a veteran of morbid science-fiction films such as "Death Takes a Holiday" and "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", plays his role a bit too heavily.

As a member of the intelligentsia among fantasy films, "I Married a Witch" deserves your patronage.

"The Devil With Hitler", a Hal Roach picture released through

United Artists with Alan Mowbray, Bobby Watson, George E. Stone and Joe Devlin.

Brevity is the one redeeming feature of "The Devil With Hitler" for it is only forty minutes long. It is slapstick through and through, and after a while it gets pretty bad.

The idea is that the board of directors of Hell have been watching the career of Adolph Hitler and feel that he is the man who should be in charge down there instead of Satan (Alan Mowbray), even though Satan has had the job since, as he puts it, he was just a little devil. Mowbray pleads for a forty-eight hour furlough in which to prove that he is really the more evil and bring back, if possible, some evidence of a kindness by Hitler.

"The Mummy's Tomb", a Universal picture with Lon Chaney, Dick Foran, Elyse Knox, John Hubbard, Wallace Ford and Turhan Bey.

Young Lon Chaney (who has now dropped the "Jr." from his name), plays the mummy, Kharis, who's been guarding the tomb of the Egyptian princess, An-kara, for three thousand years. Kharis is kept alive through the juice of three tanna leaves.

When Dick Foran and his party of archeologists violate the tomb Kharis is animated by the juice of nine tanna leaves and runs amok. Foran shoots him several times, knocks a brazier over on him and the mummy becomes dead.

Appearances are deceiving, however, for many years later, when Foran is an old man, Andoheb commissions a young priest (Turhan Bey) to take the mummy, now twisted and scarred, to America and wipe out everyone who was in the expedition, along with all blood relatives.

So a reign of terror comes to Mapleton, Massachusetts. There are murders and abductions and scarings into paralysis until the villagers take up torches and set things right again with some judiciously placed fire.

PFC Richard Wilson.



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JOURNEY'S END



By WALTER KUBILIUS

Through chill space the ship
plunged for a dozen lifetimes—
on a journey which had no end!

AN AGONY of pain sat upon Burnett's chest. How long it racked him he did not know, for consciousness was slow in coming. Every cell of his lungs cried for air. He breathed—and gasped chokingly.

Water!

"Look—he moves!" a faint voice cried from a measureless distance.

Burnett choked, flailed with his arms, turning, desperately trying to rise as he suddenly remembered where he was.

The preservative solution! That fool Ko-Tan had failed in adapting the energy transformer to the production of Zitalite—the liquid that preserved living organic matter forever. He, Burnett, was now doomed to die in the spaceship like all the others!

His tortured lungs gasped for air as his head emerged above the waterline. Weakly he placed his arm on the edge of the tank and collapsed, waiting for his beating heart to subside.

"Quick! Bring me the towel—he needs help," a voice said. Burnett heard light steps walk away and return.

"Here it is!"

Strong arms lifted him from the tank and gently led him to a couch. His eyes were still closed and felt heavy. Too much of the sediment must have deposited upon them.

Burnett leaned back upon the couch and sighed in relief as someone washed and rubbed his aching muscles.

"Ah! That's good, Ko-Tan," he said—and then suddenly remembered there were two people in the room beside him, not one. "Fool!" he said sharply. "Who else is here? I thought I swore you to secrecy. There'll be the devil to pay if the others hear of this. Open my eyes!"

Deft fingers carefully brushed away the caked deposit. Burnett looked upward, blinking rapidly and accustoming himself to the light. So the preservation had failed, he thought. Well, there was nothing else to do but await the inevitable.

Sensing his thoughts, the seated figure next to him spoke.

"There will be a shock," he said. "Prepare."

Burnett faced him, but his eyes could not discern the features clearly even yet.

"I am not Ko-Tan," the man said.

"Then—then where is he?" Burnett said wonderingly. He looked at the man. He was short and extremely pale. His hairless head seemed to be of unusual size.

"My name is Milavo," he said. "This is my wife, Lita." A short and pale woman bowed low, said:

"I am honored, noble ancestor."

Burnett turned sharply to Milavo.

"How long has it been?" he snapped.

"The preservative solution was always in perfect condition," Milavo said. "There was no reason to awaken you before the time, so your ancient instructions were obeyed to the letter."

"How long?" Burnett demanded.

Milavo paused before answering. He looked into Burnett's eyes.

"Five thousand years."

"Liar!" Burnett shouted. "Stupid liar! In five thousand years the language would have changed—but you speak English. In five thousand years the very physical structure of the human race would change—"

He could not go on. He saw, all at once, that—Milavo and Lita *were* changed. Their albino color, tendrillike fingers and huge heads already set them apart from him.

"We learned your language from records. Our own has changed much." He exchanged a number of fluid but clipped sentences with his wife. Burnett could not understand them. "As to physical changes, you can see we are—different."

CONFUSED, Burnett stood up and walked to the great circular window facing the void that he knew so well. In the distance a blazing sun shone fiercely. Almost below his feet was a round blue-brown planet, here and there dotted with cottonlike formations of clouds. A strange yearning shook him.

"Earth!" he said.

Milavo shook his head.

"The second planet of Proxima Centauri."

"—I remember," said Burnett.

Instinctively he looked up into the heavens and his eyes sought the sun he had known.

It still shone, a small brilliant point in a field of cold darkness.

"Earth, Mars and all the planets?" he asked. "What of them?"

"Charred cinders," Milavo answered. "The sun became a nova shortly after you were placed in the preservative solution."

"Before." Burnett said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"It happened before I was placed in the preservative. I saw the nova."

Burnett shuddered as he remembered. The spaceship *Victory* was far beyond the orbit of Pluto when the sun burst in an

all-consuming flash. The outer layers of the sun were blown off with a speed that almost reached that of light. The gravitational effect of the collapsing core squeezed out waves of pure energy—electrons and ions, gamma rays, cosmic and ultra-violet rays grappled and burst through.

Nothing survived the first flash. All life was destroyed with a single mighty blow. Only the scarred but still flying *Victory*, far beyond Pluto's orbit, contained a handful of human lives. Twenty years were spent in searching the solar system for another spaceship that might miraculously have escaped the nova. None was found.

It was with a sinking heart that Burnett and the men and women of the crew realized that the *Victory* contained the last of the human race.

Then, with heart-breaking sadness, they turned their backs to the solar graveyard and headed toward Proxima Centauri, the nearest star.

Rising from his brief reverie Burnett turned to Milavo. "The estimated time for the journey between the solar system and Centauri was four hundred years. How is it you claim five thousand years elapsed?"

Lita moved quietly to a single shelf on which lay a few dust-covered volumes.

"We have reconstructed the history of our ship," she said. "It may help you to catch up?"

Burnett smiled.

"Thank you," he said, taking the volumes.

"We will leave you now," Milavo said.

"We must make arrangements for landing on the Second Planet."

"Journey's end, eh?" Burnett mused as Milavo and Lita left him alone. He thought for a long while before opening the first book.

THE YEARS passed. The original crew that left Earth had long since dissolved into nothingness and their children's children took their place. The Earth's small, hot sun still rose and set, but only over a dead scarred world. In his preservative solution Burnett lived on.

Alone, of all the gigantic crew, he had no wife nor child. Ko-Tan devised the preservative means of keeping him in suspended animation until the *Victory* would reach Centauri, four hundred years thence.

One hundred years passed, and then another. The essence of Earth culture was contained in the ship. Though the individuals might die the race went on. This was the long voyage to a new home.

The lights were dimmed during the rest hours. Though for the past seventy years the *Victory* had not encountered a single formidable meteor stream every portion of space was carefully watched. On this day Lisabeth, together with Jon, stood guard over the instrument panels.

"How silent it is!" she said. "I can almost hear my heart beating in the stillness."

Only a soft light played upon the gauges. The rest of the room was in darkness. They could watch the broad sweep of stars through the great curved windows that almost surrounded them.

"Somewhere out there is Centauri," she whispered—"the star we will never reach."

"Our descendants will," Jon said.

Lisabeth blushed. Jon reached for her hand.

"Promise," he said, "that when the next council meeting comes you'll agree to be my mate."

Her eyes turned away. Neither of them saw the violent flickering on the panel. Their hearts were elsewhere.

"I—" she began to say, answering the pressure of his hand—but the words were never finished.

Faintly the pit-pat of meteorites striking the shell of the spaceship could be heard. One glance at the burning red gauge that marked the presence of foreign bodies told her all that was needed.

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"Sound the alarm!" she cried.

It rang suddenly, sharply, breaking the stillness. Sleepy-eyed men poured into the corridors, carrying spacesuits on their shoulders. There was no panic. Each donned his protective garment, went to his appointed place. All doors were immediately sealed. If a meteor smashed through the walls they would have time—and air—to repair the damage.

The pounding upon the walls became louder and louder. Uneasily the men and women looked at each other. It was difficult to walk as the ship was buffeted right and left by the swarm of pelting stones. Lisabeth's calm face, shining through the globe of her spacesuit, reassured him. They would ride this out!

The floor beneath them plunged violently. The lights blinked and then suddenly died. The floor was weaving crazily under them as the motors sputtered, trying to break through a crushing weight. A thin line of stars, now visible upon the wall, told him that the ship had cracked. A second crash struck behind him, and the night enveloped him. . . .

When consciousness came back he dimly saw the great rent through the center of the ship. Around it lay the bodies of men whose spacesuits had been pierced by meteorites as they strove to repair the break. The control board had been smashed; the great library wrecked.

Sick at heart, he moved slowly towards the rent and seized the metal welder from the grasp of one of the fallen men. He took a position and slowly began to work, extending the wall of the ship so it would reach the other side and close the great gap. The hail of meteorites still shot through, though the rent was becoming smaller and smaller.

Weakly he collapsed as, feeling a warm rush of blood upon his arm, he knew he was struck.

Slowly, before the final darkness would seize him, he made his way to the body of Lisabeth. He looked through the broken helmet and saw the stone-still lips, forever closed around the words, *I promise. . . .*

But before the void closed in upon him he knew the rent had been repaired. The *Victory* would reach Centauri after all.

TWO thousand years later—

The welts on his back burned deeply. The whips of the Prophet's slaves had dug sharp. A small trail of

blood lay behind him as he crawled his way to the Sanctuary.

A slight noise froze him still. He paused, not daring to breathe, and listened. All was still in the heart of the great ship. As yet the body of the stupid guard had not been found.

The alarm was not given. There was still time.

Painfully he crawled on, conscious that his life's blood was slowly dripping away. What was it he had said on that eventful moment a few hours ago?

The Veil! Yes, that was it—the Veil. Defying the law that said no one but the Prophet could go past the Veil to see the Presence, he did go through and saw—the Presence!

For years—for centuries—the Prophets had terrorized the people with threats of death and punishment should their wishes be disobeyed. Always he had believed them. Always, that is, until he overheard the Prophet saying to one of his lesser priests, "You know, the Ancients would not call us Prophets. They would call us engineers. A curious word, is it not?"

He thought and thought about that word until he determined to find out for himself what it meant. And that was why he went beyond the Veil to see—the Presence!

He laughed. The Presence. It was a monstrous hoax. The great god Engo Transfo was not a god at all. It was nothing but a great terrible machine!

True, it made marvelous things. It made air and food and metal and all the things the people needed, but nevertheless it was still a machine.

An engineer, then, was someone who could run the machine, the god which was called in the old day, an energy transformer. Why then, could he not be an engineer?

"There is no Presence!" he had told the people—and they beat him.

"It is only a machine. We could build another if we would study it!" And they whipped him and put him in prison, where the Prophets tortured him.

Very well, then! his delirious mind was saying. *Let the Prophets stop me now—if they can!*

He crawled past the black Veil that hid Engo Transfo in the Sanctuary. A sleeping guardsman did not feel the silken noose tighten around his neck until it was too late. He took the blade from the body, climbed the few steps

that arched over the mass of tubes and wires. With one sweep he smashed a single glowing tube that gave life to the motors. One slash followed another and the crisscrossed wires became tangled shreds. A burbling tube broke through and purple gas spilled over the delicate gears and cams, smoke rising in angry billows.

Weakly he dropped the sword upon the delicate crystals that lay in the heart of the transformer. One blinding flash followed another in roaring succession.

Sudden silence. He crawled to the foot of the machine, held to the Veil and, falling, dragged it down with him. The Veil was broken. The frightened people would see for themselves that the Presence was nothing but a machine. They would force the priests and prophets to fix the life-giving machine—and then teach them how to run it.

Then *all* would be engineers—just as even Saint Burnett, whose body lay sleeping, must have been an engineer in his time.

FOUR thousand years after the nova—
“Father, what is outside?”
“Outside? Why, what do you mean?”

“The blackness there, with all the little white lights.”

“Nothing,” the older man said. “There’s nothing there but space and those lights which we call stars.”

For a moment the boy was satisfied. Then another question came from his lips.

“Father, who made everything?”

Startled, he could not answer immediately. “Why,” he stammered, “no one. It was always here.”

“McLain says that people made everything. He says that all this is not really our home, that we’re staying here only until we find another home.”

The elderly man was irritated. “If McLain is so smart,” he snapped, “ask him *why*. Isn’t he satisfied here?”

“Oh.”

The boy was disappointed and left. Always he had been given the same sort of answers, as if people didn’t really care. Only old McLain shared his curiosity about the *outside*.

“Read this book,” the frail old man said, giving him some faded scraps of paper. Most of it he couldn’t understand. Maybe when he was grown up and taught

the secrets of the energy transformer he would understand, but not now. The book was all about the *Victory*, how it was built and how it could be made to move. He did not read any of that for his attention was on the chapter that dealt with the door. It wasn’t an ordinary door, he found out; it was called an airlock. It was really two doors instead of one, and they opened to the outside.

During one rest period he determined to open the door—just once. Then he would close it.

He had memorized the number to turn and was surprised to find that the wheels moved easily and quickly. He heard a single snap—and pushed the door open.

He could see nothing. He pushed the door still wider. When the light fell over his shoulder he saw that it opened to a small room at whose end was the second door.

Quickly he made his way to the second door and pulled at the dials, slowly turning them. He heard the first click, the second—and then felt McLain’s bony hand upon his shoulder.

“Fool!” the old man’s voice grated in his ear. “Do you want to kill all of us! The frozen void is death!”

“I—I—the outside—” the boy whimpered, frightened.

“Never mind,” McLain said, becoming kinder and turning the boy away. “It is our fault for becoming so satisfied with our life here that we forget to explain the hair-breadth of life we occupy in death-dealing space. . . .”

BURNETT could read no longer. He closed the book and shuddered.

Human life had hung in the balance on a thousand and one occasions, when only a single step was needed to destroy forever the last vestige of Earth’s life.

At last the terrible struggle was over. Proxima Centauri had been reached.

Milavo, Lita and another group of albino-white, large-headed humans came into his room.

“We have landed on the second planet,” Milavo said. “Would you be the first to walk upon its soil? Perhaps it means something to you.”

Burnett’s heart hammered. It did. Five thousand years ago he had seen the Earth go up in smoke. He had made a pledge then, to Ko-Tan.

"This ship, the *Victory*," he had said, "contains all that remains of the human race. Every empire and tradition ever spawned upon our mother planet lives in us from now on. We can never return, but we can find another planet. We can make another Earth. This is good-by. None of us will see Earth again. You will know only the solitude of space and the loneliness of the stars. You will grow old and die. I shall be the only one to set foot upon another planet. But I give you my word, Ko-Tan—that planet will be another Earth. I swear it!"

Remembering what he had said, in impressive silence Burnett walked down the plank to the soil of the second planet. Milavo, Lita and a few others followed. The great majority of the ship's crew remained, staring curiously out of the windows.

Burnett breathed deeply. The air was rich in oxygen but nevertheless quite suitable. Only a glance was needed to tell him that. Rich foliage was everywhere. The lower forms of animal life, somewhat different from Earth types, chattered in the forest. In the distance purple mountains broke the day, bringing early evening.

The planet was young. Earth must have been like this in the days of Eden.

He turned happily to Milavo and Lita. "This will make a splendid home," he said. "I never dreamed there'd be such a luxurious planet circling Centauri. This is almost a replica of Earth. What a glorious civilization we can build here!"

"We must test the soil for radio-active metals," Burnett went on, "and set about to build more energy transformers. We will certainly need many. Secondly, a group of us must minutely explore the planet for all possible traces of other intelligent life. Should we find any we must make our intentions clear and unmistakable. I do not think we will have any trouble, though. The planet seems to have been made for us."

"You—you will stay?" Milavo said, as if not comprehending Burnett's plans.

"Why, of course we will stay!"

"No. No," Milavo said quickly. "You, not us."

Burnett looked quickly at him. "I didn't understand you," he said sharply.

"We will not stay here," Milavo said.

Amazed, Burnett could only stare at him.

"In heaven's name," he shouted, "why

not? This planet is ideal, I tell you! You'll never find another one like it, no matter how much you search! This is journey's end, I tell you—it's like coming home again!"

Milavo looked about him. Lita clung to his arms. A strange bird screeched in a tree. Leaves rustled as the wind blew through them. The sky was brilliant red in the glory of a sunset.

Burnett broke the stillness.

"What is wrong?" he asked, though he began to suspect.

Lita clung closer to Milavo.

"It—it is horrible!" Milavo said.

THE others, one by one, had quietly walked back to the ship.

"Yes it's ugly. Monstrously ugly!"

Lita said.

Burnett could not believe his ears. "This—" he gestured—"ugly?"

A butterfly flew overhead and alighted on his shoulder.

Lita screamed, broke away and ran to the ship. Milavo's pale face was even whiter. Even the startled flight of the butterfly did not ease him.

"Is this beauty?" he demanded, "I never dreamed such a hellish planet could exist! Look at the ground," he said. "Vermin! The air—filled with strange particles of loose matter that will clog our lungs and kill us. Microscopic germs everywhere. Listen, Burnett, your body has been brought up in such a revolting planet that it seems to be like nothing. But for five thousand years we have lived decently and sanely in a scientific environment which we ourselves made pure and clean. Do you think we'd give that up and live in the horrible impurity of this ugly planet? Never!"

Bewildered, Burnett could only gape at him. "But this is home," he said. "This is where we started out to go." Lamely, he stopped.

"The human race has changed," Milavo said. "We could never endure planetary life, and would not survive in such an environment. Our home is space. We build our environment in our ship. There we live; on a planet we would die. I must go back."

He turned and waited at the door. When Burnett did not follow, he entered and closed the lock. . . .

Burnett sat down on a small ledge. *Ugly. Monstrous. Revolting.* Those words flew back and forth in his brain. Milavo was right; the human race had changed.

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It had changed so much that that which was once thought to be an integral part of human nature, Earth love, turned out to be nothing.

Five thousand years in space, with all its hardships and experiences, had given the colony a common tradition, a common culture which was utterly alien to the planetary life of their ancestors.

What could Milavo know of the strange sensation that filled him as he clutched a handful of dirt and crushed it in his hand, thinking of the wheat, rye and fruits that it could yield? And what did he himself know of the life which Milavo, Lita and all the other descendants of his friends experienced?

Once the fish had lost its gills in evolution, it could not go back to the water. The *Victory* would never come back to any Earth.

Milavo opened the door and called out, "Will you come with us?"

Burnett shook his head. Tears filled his eyes.

The great rocket shook and rumbled away. He watched it leave, rising up into the darkness from whence it came.

When he was alone Burnett thought of Ko-Tan, his crew, and the promise he had made to start a new Earth. He had failed.

Alone, the last of the human race, he would die. The culture and civilization he had known would die with him.

But he looked up into the heavens, at the gigantic expanse of numberless stars, and suddenly knew that human life had not failed. If Man had a destiny, it could still be fulfilled.

True, planetary life was over. But Milavo and Lita, and their children's children, faced another life. An earthbound people became a space-dwelling people. In the centuries to come they would discover ways and means of making other spaceships, and these ships would be filled with their children. Where there was one *Victory* in the skies, there would be two. Then four—six—a dozen.

The instinct of the race to survive and reproduce would never perish.

Millions of years would pass, and the void would be filled with cities occupied by the descendants of men and women who, finding the secret of atomic power, left the prisons of the planets forever.

Burnett looked up into the sky. The cosmic design was clear.

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

(Continued from page 114)

background. This will probably be your year's best.

Now for the interior pics. Damon Knight improves by leaps and bounds with every succeeding issue. He's something in his work that appeals to me a lot. Looking at his work for *Garments of Doom*, I detect a trend toward the type of drawing that brought such fame to Hannes Bok. This should be considered a compliment, of course. Since Bok has deserted his drawing board for a typewriter, we need somebody to fill his place. It's my opinion that Damon will soon reach that peak. Let's hope so. Lawrence in very good, per usual. Knight's (?) work for *Circle of Youth* is poor, but it was a hard story to illustrate. Paul is wonderful, with one of his best pics ever. Morey is somewhat better than usual, and Dolgov is better than ever.

As that takes care of the art work, let's get down to the stories:

1. *The Persecutors*: A neat little fantasy, with a slight touch of science.
2. *For Sale—One World*: Rocklynne is getting back into his old style.
3. *Garments of Doom*: Neat and snappy. Appealing short.
4. *Circle of Youth*: Fair.
5. *Sunward Flight*: Sure, I know. You don't have to tell me. Everybody else will rate in about first or second place, but I just didn't like it.
6. *The Fear Planet*: I hate stories with planets, hatracks, trees, coat hangers, shrubs, or hall-trees as villains!
7. *War God's Gamble*: Futuristic Nazis! Bah!

I'm still raving over Finlay's swlegant cover. Even the space ship cut looked o. k. with The Cover Master's black background. The only time yellow is appropriate on a cover is against black. But couldn't you take away the space ship entirely, leaving the same type of title lettering? It makes the mag look silly.

There's another thing that worries me. I see that Popular Pubs have taken over the Munsey group, including *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. Please, pal, please continue to give us the neat, sophisticated, trimmed edges that the mag enjoyed while under the Munsey dynasty. And, as the former edite promised us, bring on *The Moon Pool* and *Conquest of the Moon Pool* complete in the same issue, and *Ship of Ishtar* soon. As you have done on the covers of *Astonishing* and *Super Science*, confine all lettering to a panel at the bottom of the page, so as not to spoil Finlay's wonderful work.

I'd like to make this about twice as long, but as I can't think of anything more to say, I close.

Sincerely yours,
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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

Stick to Venus, says Louis
Charlottesville, Va.
Jan. 4, 1943

Gentlemen:

If it makes Ross Rocklynn happy to grow roundworms on the third planet of Betelgeuse to his heart's content, surely I should be the last to deny him this harmless hobby. But when he comes down to Earth and informs us that the visitors from Klutz pass through solid walls by means of mitosis (!) it becomes impossible for me to suffer in silence such an outrage upon the accepted meaning of the word. Mitosis means the process of normal cell division, during which a cell duplicates itself in all respects, including its chromosomes, and then divides into two daughter cells like the parent cell.

What Rocklynn was thinking of was osmosis. Now osmosis is something quite different and is a physico-chemical process which many organisms find quite useful. It involves the one-way passage of certain substances through a semi-permeable membrane, as a result of which, for instance, the concentration of a given salt, initially equal on both sides of such a membrane, becomes greater on one side due to the one-way diffusion. Passing one solid object through another solid object is certainly not osmosis; and if you can do it, you can name it as you please. But there is obviously a certain crude analogy between osmosis and solid-through-solid. This is what Rocklynn was after—but mitosis! Mitosis!! And he even makes a verb out of it—"they mitosed through. . . ." Oowah.

Won't you please ask Mr. Rocklynn not to use impressive-sounding words with quite an airy nonchalance in the future? Thank you very much. (PS: I enjoyed the story anyway).

A word to the rest of the stories, since I'm at it. Persecutors was reasonably acceptable. The deficiency, I believe, lay in the fact that I am innately skeptical of such sf. stock-items as the "evil" other-race. The plot, too, is quite familiar to an old-time fan, since Nat Schachner figured out the basic idea in *Emissaries of Space* (I believe the title was in an old *Wonder Quarterly*).

Sunward Flight is better stuff. Unfortunately, however, the proposition that 5 persons can run a spaceship designed for a crew of 21, and defeat one with full complement, seems much more fantastic than the light-cancelling weapon. Furthermore, Zagat has the queerest ideas of space warfare I've run across in a long time. If a spaceship can accelerate to a speed of 40 miles per second, it will maintain that speed without expending any more energy, merely because the friction in the near-vacuum of interplanetary space is utterly negligible, and inertia has its way. If the ship has fuel,

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

it can keep accelerating. There's a limit to the rate of acceleration humans can stand (and it's nearer 7 than 10 G's) but none, except possibly the speed of light, to the speed which can be obtained by constant acceleration, even at a low value, say 1 or 2 G's, if you're able to spend the fuel.

Then again, traveling at 40 mps towards the *Wanderer*, which is moving at 45 mps toward him, Hallam half loops and winds up going in the opposite direction at 45 mps (presumably) since the story has him paralleling the *Wanderer* so close that his under jets fuse the hostile ship. Very pretty, but Zagat is thinking in terms of airplane combat in the 1914-1918 war. If it takes Hallam 1 second to do a half loop to reverse his course, (and to do it in minutes would be a remarkable feat!) the *Wanderer* would be 45 miles away, and since the story says Hallam's ship is slower, his chances of executing that trick maneuver seem absolutely zero.

Your short stories are your weak point. I buy your magazine, of course, in the memory of *Genus Homo*, and the hopes or another such: please don't keep me waiting too many years. Meanwhile, however, I see no reason why your short-story authors shouldn't do a little better than they've done thus far. Walton's story is perhaps the best, meaning the most amusing. Bloch needs to be told the facts of astronomy. There is not, and never was, except perhaps very, very briefly, an asteroid with a breathable atmosphere; the things just don't have the gravity to hold an atmosphere. He should have stuck to Venus, in which case no complaints!

Louis Russell Chauvenet.

How was the art work this time, Clinton?
Box 165
St. Anthony, Ohio

Dear Editor:

I have seen *Super Science Stories* grow into one of the best science-fiction magazines on the market. If it keeps on the way it is going now, it won't be long until it is the best.

The February issue was up to standard. The cover was by Virgil Finlay and was, therefore, excellent. By the way, what was the green-eyed "critter" for? I don't remember him in the story. Best inside pic of course was Paul's for *Sunward Flight* with Lawrence's a close second. I don't usually like Dolgov but his pics were pretty good this time. Morey's picture for *The Fear Planet* was fair. Get rid of Knight. His was a putrid illustration and was not unusual for him. The stories were all good. They rate as follows:

No. 1. *Sunward Flight* Arthur Leo Zagat. With stories like this, we should



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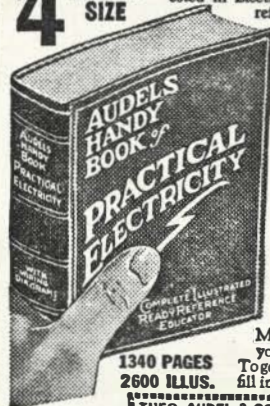
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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

have more by Mr. Zagat. Boy, what a cover picture could have been made from some of the scenes in this story.

No. 2. *For Sale—One World* Ross Rocklynne. Although there wasn't much of a plot in this story, the story was held up all the way through by the humor. Science fiction needs mor of this type of story.

No. 3. *The Fear Planet* Robert Bloch. Gosh! Doesn't Mr. Bloch have bad dreams? When he wants to write a weird story, he sure outdoes himself.

No. 4. *The Persecutors* Cleve Cartmill. This story was all right I suppose, but it left me feeling kind of depressed and thoughtful. Oh well—

No. 5. *War God's Gamble* Harry Walton.

No. 6. *Circle of Youth* Frank Belknap Long.

In *Missives and Missiles*, I noticed that Gene Hunter was too busy throwing brick-bats at the magazine to mention his obsession, that mighty good improvement of science fiction magazines, the trimmed edges. Jay Chidsey, however, brought it up and didn't say he wanted it. There is one other S. F. mag. in the field that has trimmed edges and it is a quarterly also. Golly, you must not know how easy it is to handle, how much it improves it, what a joy it is to read out of it. I would buy it just to look at the trimmed edges. Yay for Gene Hunter, trimmed edges—boo to anyone opposing trimmed edges. Improve the pulp magazines with trimmed edges. Oh, by the way, two people said Ray Cummings is improving and no one voted against him in last month's story. So long 'til next time.

Clinton Blackburn
St. Anthony
Idaho

Sometimes we don't know either!

1542 California Ave. (rear)
Fresno, California
Jan. 14, 1943

Dear Editor Norton:

My first to Reader Dept., though an old fan . . . Condensed rating of just the top tales in S.S. in 1942:—

Feb. S.S.—1st *The Hunted Ones* (by Harry); 2nd *Atrakin and the Man*; 3rd *Cross of Mercurux*.

May—1st *Sunken Universe* Merlyn needs a sequel; 2nd *The World Within* (Bond); 3rd *The Missing Day* (Hasse).

August—1st *Cube from Space* (a better-sort one by L. Brackett); 2nd, because of humor, *An Old Neptunian Custom* (Mariner); 3rd *Mars Warning* (Hasse).

Nov.—1st *His Aunt Thiamin* (Barrister); 2nd *Revolt of the Machine Men* (Tanner); 3rd *We Guard Black Planet*.

Asimov, Kubilius, Pearson, Hasse, Rocklynne, and others had readable tales

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

in *S.S.* in 1942, some a toss-up (6 to 6) with stories I rated above.

I notice reader-fans are not spending quite so much time raving about the art work (as of yore) and many write interesting letters. I vote for larger letter depts. Also, why not get W. Ley, Sprague de Camp or others to write one good science article for each issue of *S.S.*?

In Feb. ('43) *C.C.*:—Ross Rocklynne's *For Sale—One World* is an admirable fantasy, but poor (if you call it *S.F.*) Protoplasmic monsters do not develop that much mentality on any world. I enjoyed it. . . . I stick a dab of salt in my mouth and then joyously class Cleve Cartmill's psychological *The Persecutors* as 1st, however. The weird fantasy of R. Bloch's *Fear Planet* barely makes 3rd because of a feeling that the *S.F.* tale *Circle of Youth* (by Long) is too implausible for a moon of far Neptune.

The movies may call all *S.F.* "fantasy". Some *S.F.* mags. use some fantasy and call it all science fiction. Others publish both but try to judge and label it. What class, Ed., what class?

Sincerely,
Augustus Elliott Kinkade

More Lawrence coming up, Chum

Coleraine, Minn.
January 5, 1943

Fictioneers, Inc.
New York, N. Y.
Dear Editor:

Well, here goes for my first attempt to crash *Missives and Missiles* in your mag. I've been reading *SSS* for quite a few years now, but I just never got around to it. First of all, your February issue is just about the most super colossal I've yet run into—almost as good as your November one, which, by the same standard (mine), was tops.

But enough prattle and gab. To the mag, men, to the mag. The cover 'warn't bad a bit—that is as far as actual artistry is concerned. Finlay was by no means at his best, although the fault is perhaps not all his. The characters depicted are entirely irrelevant to the story, and who in the world is the overgrown genie operating the thing-a-ma-jig. And say, I side with "The One-Man Gallup Poll" in an earnest and forthright plea for more Lawrence.

He's good.

The stories were swell, with Ross Rocklynne's *For Sale—One World* taking my vote for first place. The plot was good, with a new twist not yet run into by the writer—that is, the actual reactions of a visitor to our planet.

As ever,
Fiction's Fall Guy
Barry Rowles
Coleraine, Minn.

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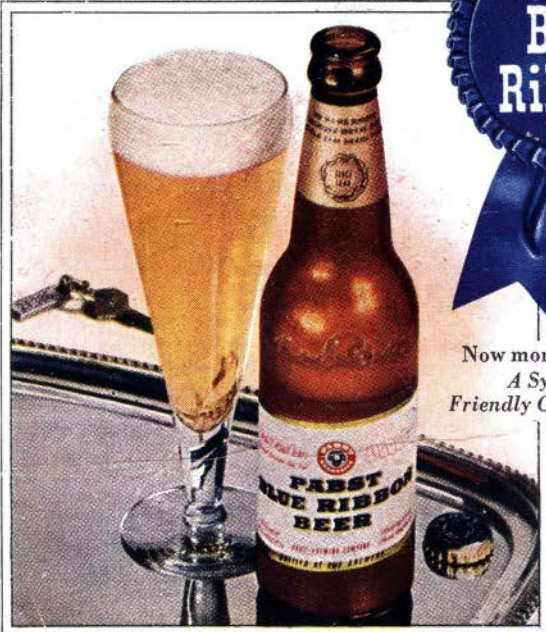
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