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A FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

by LYLE MONROE

NOV. 1941 SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

146 PAGES

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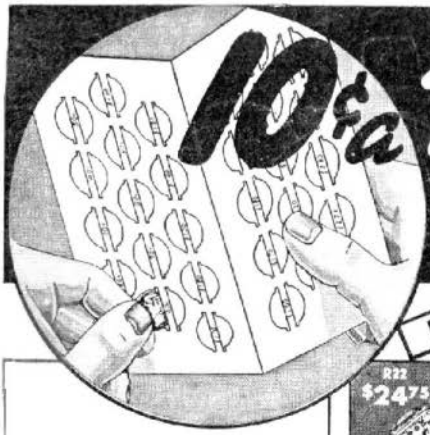

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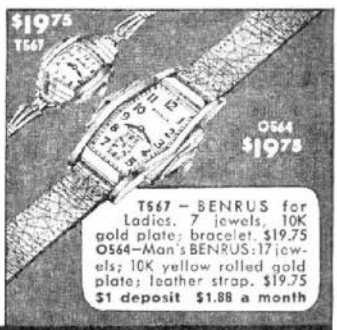

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Mail the coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 of the men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.

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THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 3 NOVEMBER, 1941 NO. 2

DARING FULL LENGTH NOVEL

DRAMATIC NOVELETTES

GRIPPING SHORT FICTION

SPECIAL FEATURES

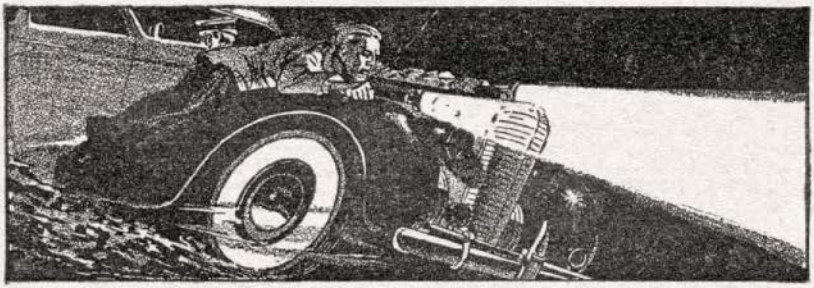
Published quarterly by Fictioneers, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter February 1, 1941, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. Single copy price 20c. Four issue subscription in the U.S.A. $.80.

"WE RACED DEATH DOWN A MOUNTAIN SIDE!"

A true experience of male nurse GROVER C. BIRCHFIELD, Los Angeles, Calif.

"WE WERE RUSHING A CARDIAC CASE by ambulance to the hospital one dark night," writes Mr. Birchfield. "We were two thousand feet up on a winding mountain road and six miles from our goal, when all lights blew out.

"THE PATIENT WAS AT DEATH'S DOOR. I gave him a shot of adrenalin, but I knew with horrible certainty that unless he reached the hospital quickly he could not live. Yet we dared not move without lights.



"THEN, I REMEMBERED OUR FLASHLIGHTS! Lying on a front fender, I played their bright beams on the road while the car careened down the mountain. Thanks to dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, we won our race against death.

(*Signed*) Grover C. Birchfield"

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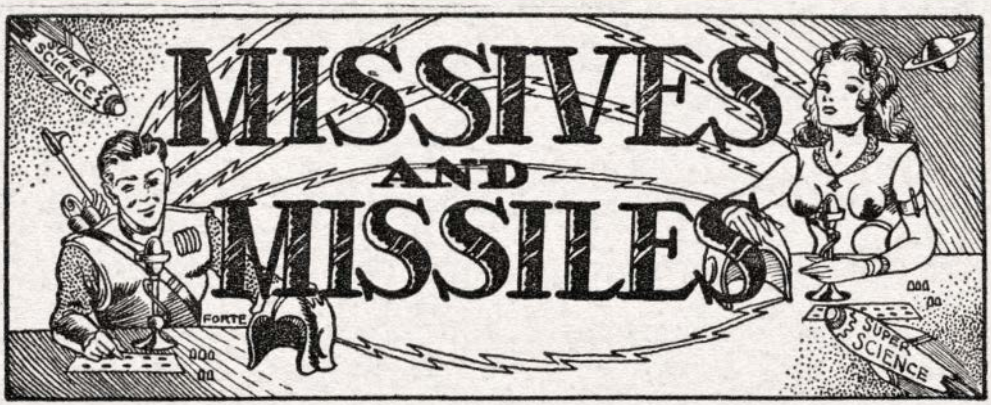

SOMEWHERE, to every man, there is a last frontier. To most it is the finite, cramped path from work to play to sleep and back to work again. To some, it is the seven seas and the far places of the world as we know it. To a favored few, it is the nameless, unexplored world of the unknown.

To the last group, science fiction is aimed and dedicated. And that is as it should be. For these men and women alone have accepted the challenge of eternity—the swift, sure knowledge that black as the veil of ignorance is, it is not impregnable. Each day the restless blade of science and the probing fingers of higher mental research reach farther into the gloom, rationalizing, stripping the veil from the unclaimed wastelands of the human mind and the cosmos it inhabits.

A handful of these chosen few have been endowed with literary gifts, so that they might share their adventures with all who dare accompany them into the realms of darkness—beyond which is the realm of limitless sight. To such men, the pages of this book are ever open.

The present issue of Super Science Stories is published under new editorial direction. In selecting its complement of fiction, the new staff has been guided solely by two criteria—entertainment value, and the sincerity of the author's projection into the unknown.

It is not an easy path. To the sacred cows, to the stodgy, the hidebound, the mortals that are fortunate enough—or unfortunate enough—to be satisfied with things as they are, science fiction will forever be an irritant, particularly if it is good enough to shock them out of their complacency, if only for a brief hour.

To them we can only say, with author Lyle Monroe—"The door of the mind is open."

We may unconsciously jostle a few sacred cows ourselves. We do not hold with those readers who maintain that spaceships, visitors from Mars and wars between planets mark the boundaries of our scope. Personally, we'd rather publish an out-and-out fantastic that was a good story than a down-the-middle science yarn that happened to be on the dull side. We heartily agree, however, with the tenet that stories of the supernatural have no place in this field. Beyond that—well, we're still searching for that last frontier!

A slightly puzzled gentleman has decorated our mailbag with the following:

Super Science Novels
Gentlemen:

As a comparatively new reader of science fiction, I thought that my opinions and comments about your book might be of interest to you. To be perfectly frank, I had always turned up my nose at the fantasy stories that glutted the newsstands. I had read a few, many years ago, and found them too ridiculous for words.

But after a long period of fasting, I finally weakened and bought a copy of Super Science Novels. That was your August issue. And I admit I was mildly surprised—and not unpleasantly so.

I believe I detected in your magazine a strain of something I had never come across in any of my previous adventures with that type of publication—and that something seemed to be a scientific ap-

(Continued on page 8)

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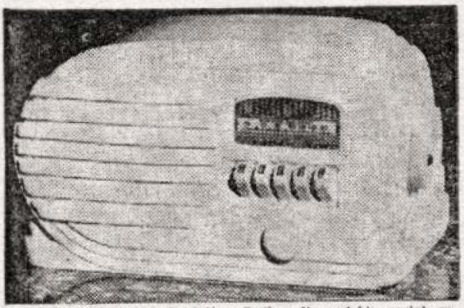

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WATCH About Size of a Dime for Ladies, Girls---

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MAIL COUPON

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Premium Division, Dept. PP-91, Date .....

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TOWN ..... STATE .....

Print Your Last Name Only in Spaces Below:

WRITE, or PASTE COUPON ON A POSTAL

(Continued from page 6)

proach—or at least a scientific basis to many of these stories.

I firmly believe that this scientific basis is the only justification for stories of this sort. I would be indeed gratified (and also a confirmed fan) if I knew that a definite point of policy would be this scientific basis.

We know little about the world beyond the scope of our knowledge. Occasionally experimental science will give us some clue about things that are possible, and about things that yet may be. When fiction is an interpellation of these legitimate scientific leads, it serves a useful social purpose. For many of us wonder where the advancement of science will lead us. And we are very happy to read a logical, plausible narrative about what this world of future science will be like.

But those ridiculous fantasies you ran —ugh! Take "Vendetta on Venus." Now that was something rare—and it's a good thing. I wish such stories might be rare to the point of non existence. I don't consider myself a puny intellect, but between you and me, what the devil was that all about? If you, or if any reader can furnish me with a satisfactory, sensible explanation of the story, I'd be very grateful. At first when I couldn't understand it, I figured it was an obscure allegory of some sort and that the conclusion would make it all clear to me. But came the end of the story—and still no enlightenment.

Gentlemen, that piece of fiction was as fine a bit of incomprehensibility as I've ever come across. And the most incomprehensible part about it was that such an unintelligible collection of sentences was ever printed.

So take your choice, gentlemen. More stories with a scientific basis, and you've got an ardent reader. But continued use of incomprehensibles, or those horrid fantasies like "Willie Wins a War" will drive me away—if they don't drive me crazy first.

Sincerely,
J. Warrington Block

From a heated burgher from Brooklyn, we give you the following:

Dear Sir:

I've just finished reading your August issue. Permit me to say it is of the genus punko, with a few exceptions. "Aerita of the Light Country," after a good start, bogs down into senseless hack drivel. The short stories were left unfinished. L. Sprague de Camp really saved the book with "Invaders from Nowhere."

I guess you understand I am not one of your satisfied readers.

About the art, however—now we can brighten up a bit. Bok is terrific, Isip passable, Morey uneven but on the whole better than average. Covers and layouts can stand more original handling.

On second thought, I'll give Cummings another chance. After all, he did write "Girl of the Golden Atom"—once!

I'm still keeping my blood pressure down, pal. But you've got to do better by me next time—or else!

J. R. Connel,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

We're sorry that that old bugaboo Space has to break in on this seminar, readers. We'll try to save room for a larger department next time. In the interim, any comments you may have on this issue will be appreciated. We're going to try to give you the science fiction you want to see. It is for you to be the judge and the final arbiter.

The Editors

IS YOUR Rupture GETTING Worse?

It is terrible to feel that your rupture is constantly getting worse, taking the joy out of life, even making you feel despondent—without your seeming to be able to DO anything about it! And yet, it's so needless! We have information for you that has brought deliverance and joy to thousands of men, women and children, as PROVED by their letters of gratitude—now on file in our office.

STOP IT, STOP IT!
Be Yourself Again!

As sure as you live and breathe, if you have a reducible rupture, you can stop your rupture worries—find yourself alive and energetic and rid of all the old fears that made your existence a bad dream!

THE FAMOUS BROOKS AUTOMATIC AIR-CUSHION APPLIANCE WILL SET YOU FREE

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X Where Is YOUR Rupture?

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BROOKS Air-Cushion does not spread rupture opening. Gives nature a real opportunity!

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In PLAIN ENVELOPE, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER. No one is to call on me personally about my rupture.

Name..... Street.....

State Whether for Man ( )

City..... State..... Woman ( ) or Child ( )

LOST LEGION

A Full-Length Science Novel

CHAPTER ONE

"Ye Have Eyes to See With!"

"HI-YAH, Butcher!" Doctor Philip Huxley put down the dice cup he had been fiddling with as he spoke, and shoved out a chair with his foot. "Sit down."

The man addressed ostentatiously ignored the salutation while handing a yellow slicker and soggy felt hat to the Faculty Clubroom attendant, but accepted the chair. His first words were to the Negro servant.

"Did you hear that, Pete? A witch-doctor, passing himself off as a psychologist, has the effrontery to refer to me —to *me,* a licensed physician and surgeon,

"The door of the mind is open, yet have a care where ye tread." Eternally sealed is a secret vault in the brain, the No Man's Land which three humans had dared to explore. . . . And found themselves at bay against the world!

By LYLE MONROE

as a butcher." His voice was filled with gentle reproach.

"Don't let him kid you, Pete. If Doctor Coburn ever got you into an operating theater, he'd open up your head just to see what makes you tick. He'd use your skull to make an ashtray."

The colored man grinned as he wiped the table, but said nothing.

Coburn clucked and shook his head. "That from a witchdoctor. Still looking for the Little Man Who Wasn't There, Phil?"

"If you mean parapsychology, yes."

"How's the racket coming?"

"Pretty good. I've got one less lecture this semester, which is just as well—I get awfully tired of explaining to the

wide-eyed innocents how little we really know about what goes on inside their think tanks. I'd rather do research."

"Who wouldn't? Struck any pay dirt lately?"

"Some. I'm having a lot of fun with a law student just now, chap named Valdez."

Coburn lifted his brows questioningly. "So? E. S. P.?"

"Kinda. He's a sort of a clairvoyant; if he can see one side of an object, he can see the other side, too."

"Nuts!"

"If you're so smart, why ain't you rich? I've tried him out under carefully controlled conditions, and he can do it—see around corners."

"A guy like that could be an awful menace at stud poker."

"Matter of fact, he made his stake for law school as a professional gambler."

"Found out how he does it?"

"No, damn it." Huxley drummed on the table top, a worried look on his face. "If I just had a little money for research, I might get enough data to make this sort of thing significant. Look at what Rhine accomplished at Duke over ten years back."

"Well, why don't you holler? Go before the board and bite 'em in the ear for it. Tell 'em how you're going to make Western University famous in ten easy lessons."

Huxley looked still more morose. "Fat chance. I talked with my dean and he wouldn't even let me take it up with the president. Scared that the old fathead will clamp down on the department even more than he has. You see, officially we are supposed to be behaviorists. Any suggestion that there might be something to consciousness that can't be explained in terms of physiology and mechanics is about as welcome as a Saint Bernard in a telephone booth."

THE TELEPHONE signal glowed red back of the attendant's counter. He switched off the news vuecast and answered the call. "Hello . . . Yes, I'll call him. Telephone for you, Doctuh."

"Switch it over here." Coburn turned the telephone panel at the table around so that it faced him; as he did so it lighted up with the serious face of a young woman. He picked up the handset. "What is it? . . . What's that? How long ago did it happen? . . . Who made the diagnosis? . . . Read that over again . . . Let me see the chart." He inspected its image reflected in the panel, then added, "Very well. I'll be right over. Prepare the patient for operating." He switched off the instrument and turned to Huxley. "Got to go, Phil—emergency."

"What sort?"

"It'll interest you. Trephining. Maybe some cerebral excision. Car accident. Come along and watch it, if you have time." He was putting on his slicker as he spoke. He turned and swung out the west door with a long, loose-limbed stride. Huxley grabbed his own raincoat and hurried to catch up with him.

"How come," he asked as he came abreast, "they had to search for you?"

"Left my pocket phone in my other suit," Coburn returned briefly. "On purpose—I wanted a little peace and quiet."

They worked north and west through the arcades and passages that connected the Union with the Science group, ignoring the moving walkways as being too slow. But when they came to the conveyor subway under Third Avenue, opposite the Pottenger Medical School, they found it flooded, its machinery stalled, and were forced to detour west to the Fairfax Avenue conveyor. Coburn cursed impartially the engineers and the planning commission for the fact that spring brings torrential rains to Southern California, Chamber of Commerce or no.

They got rid of their wet clothes in the physicians' room and moved on to the gowning room for surgery. An orderly helped Huxley into white trousers and cotton shoe covers, and they moved to the next room to scrub. Coburn invited Huxley to scrub also, in order that he might watch the operation close up. For three minutes by the little sand glass they scrubbed away with strong green soap, then stepped through a door and were gowned by silent, efficient nurses. Huxley felt rather silly to be helped on with his clothes by a pretty, diminutive nurse who had to stand on tip-toe to get the sleeves high enough. They were ushered through the glass door into Surgery III, rubber-covered hands held out, supporting a sterile towel, as if holding a skein of yarn.

THE PATIENT was already in place on the table, head raised up and skull clamped immobile. Someone snapped a switch and a merciless circle of blue-white lights beat down on the only portion of the patient that was exposed, the right side of his skull. Coburn glanced quickly around the room, Huxley following his glance—light green walls, two operating nurses, gowned, masked and hooded into sexlessness, a "dirty" nurse, busy with something in the corner, the anesthetist, the instruments that told Coburn the state of the patient's heart action and respiration.

Coburn ignored the long glass window that stretched along one side of the room, behind which medical students crowded, one with a candid camera, but Huxley noted them and the automatic motion picture camera mounted in the overhead as well.

He decided that this instrument must have a telephoto lens.

The "dirty" nurse held the chart for the surgeon to read. At a word from Coburn, the anesthetist uncovered the patient's face for a moment. Lean brown face, aquiline nose, closed sunken eyes. Huxley repressed an exclamation. Coburn raised his eyebrows at Huxley.

"What's the trouble?"

"It's Juan Valdez!"

"Who's he?"

"The one I was telling you about—the law student with the trick eyes."

"Hm——Well, his trick eyes didn't see around enough corners this time. He's lucky to be alive. Now, Phil, if you'll stand there, you'll see better."

Coburn changed to impersonal efficiency, ignored Huxley's presence and concentrated the whole of his able intellect on the damaged flesh before him. The skull had been crushed, or punched, apparently by coming into violent contact with some hard object with moderately sharp edges. The wound lay above the right ear, and was, superficially, two inches or more across. It was impossible, before exploration, to tell just how much damage had been suffered by the bony structure and the grey matter behind.

Undoubtedly there was some damage to the brain itself. The wound had been cleaned up on the surface and the area around it shaved and painted. The trauma showed up as a definite hole in the cranium. It was bleeding slightly and was partly filled with a curiously nauseating conglomerate of clotted purple blood, white tissue, grey tissue, pale yellow tissue.

The surgeon's lean slender fingers, unhuman in their pale orange coverings, moved gently, deftly in the wound, as if imbued with a separate life and intelligence of their own. Destroyed tissue, too freshly dead for the component cells to realize it, was cleared away—chipped fragments of bone, lacerated *mater dura,* the grey cortical tissue of the cerebrum itself.

Huxley became fascinated by the minuscule drama, lost track of time and of the sequence of events. He remembered terse

orders for assistance: "Clamp!" "Retractor!" "Sponge!" The sound of the tiny saw, a muffled whine, the teeth-tingling grind it made in cutting through solid, living bone. Gently a spatulate instrument was used to straighten out the tortured convolutions. Incredible and unreal, he watched a knife whittle at the door of the mind, shave the thin wall of reason.

Three times a nurse wiped sweat from the surgeon's face.

Wax performed its function, vitallum alloy replaced bone, dressing shut out infection. Huxley had watched uncounted operations, but felt again that almost insupportable sense of relief and triumph that comes when the surgeon turns away and begins stripping off his gloves.

When Huxley joined Coburn, the surgeon had doused his mask and cap, and was feeling under his gown for cigarettes. He looked entirely human again.

He grinned at Huxley and inquired, "Well, how did you like it?"

"Swell. It was the first time I was ever able to watch that type of thing so closely. You can't see so well from behind the glass, you know. Is he going to be all right?"

Coburn's expression changed. "He is a friend of yours, isn't he? That had slipped my mind for the moment. Sorry. He'll be all right, I'm pretty sure. He's young and strong, and he came through the operation very nicely. You can see for yourself in a couple of days."

"You excised quite a lot of the speech center, didn't you? Will he be able to talk when he gets well? Isn't he likely to have aphasia, or some other speech disorder?"

"Speech center? Why, I wasn't even close to the speech centers."

"Huh?"

"Put a rock in your right hand, Phil, so you'll know it next time. You're turned around a hundred and eighty degrees. I was working in the *right* cerebral lobe, not the left lobe."

Huxley looked puzzled, spread both hands out in front of him, glanced from one to the other; then his face cleared and he laughed. "You're right. You know, I have the worst time with that. I never can remember which way to deal in a bridge game. But wait a minute—I had it so firmly fixed in my mind that you were on the left side in the speech centers that I am confused. What do you think the result will be on his neurophysiology?"

"Nothing, if past experience is any criterion. What I took away he'll never miss. I was working in terra incognito, pal—No Man's Land. If that portion of the brain that I was in has any function, the best physiologists haven't been able to prove it."

CHAPTER TWO

Three Blind Mice

"YOU'VE got to get up! You've got to get up! You've got to get up this morning—"

Joan Freeman reached out blindly with one hand and shut off the music of her alarm clock, her eyes jammed tight shut in the vain belief that she could remain asleep if she did. Her mind wandered. Sunday. Don't have to get up early on Sunday. Then why had she set the alarm? She remembered suddenly and rolled out of bed, warm feet on a floor cold in the morning air. Her pajamas landed on that floor as she landed in the shower, yelled, turned the shower to "warm," then back to "cold" again. She let the air blast dry her, luxuriated for two minutes in the electrical massage, then jumped out.

The last item from the refrigerator had gone into the basket, and a thermos jug was filled by the time she heard the sound

of a car shifting gears on the hill outside, and the crunch of tires on granite in the driveway. She hurriedly pulled on short boots, snapped the loops of her jodphurs under them, and looked at herself in the mirror. Not bad, she thought. Not Miss America, but she wouldn't frighten any children. She turned away from the glass with the warm replenishment of the soul that comes only to females sure of their own appearance.

A banging at the door was echoed by the doorbell, and a baritone voice, "Joan! Are you decent?"

"Practically. Come on in, Phil."

Huxley, in slacks and polo shirt, was followed by another figure. He turned to it. "Joan, this is Ben Coburn, Doctor Ben Coburn. Doctor Coburn, Miss Freeman."

"Awfully nice of you to let me come, Miss Freeman."

"Not at all, Doctor. Phil has told me so much about you that I have been anxious to meet you." The conventionalities flowed with the ease of all long-established tribal taboo.

"Call him Ben, Joan. It's good for his ego."

While Joan and Phil loaded the car, Coburn looked over the young woman's studio house. A single large room, panelled in knotty pine and dominated by a friendly field-stone fireplace, set about with untidy bookcases, gave evidence of her personality. He had stepped through open French doors into a tiny patio, paved with mossy bricks and fitted with a barbecue pit and a little fishpond, brilliant in the morning sunlight, when he heard himself called.

"Doc! Stir your stumps! Time's a-wastin'."

He glanced again around the patio, and rejoined the others at the car. "I like your house, Miss Freeman. Why should we bother to leave here when Griffith Park can't be any pleasanter?"

"That's easy. If you stay home, it's not a picnic—it's just breakfast. My name's Joan."

"May I put in a request for 'just breakfast' here some morning—Joan?"

"Lay off o' that mug, Joan," advised Phil in a stage whisper. "His intentions ain't honorable."

JOAN straightened up the remains of what had recently been a proper sized meal. She chucked into the fire three well-picked bones to which thick sirloin steaks were no longer attached, added some discarded wrapping paper and one lonely roll. She shook the thermos jug. It gurgled slightly. "Anybody want some more grapefruit juice?"

"Any more coffee?" asked Coburn, then continued to Huxley, "His special talents are gone completely?"

"Plenty," Joan replied. "Serve yourselves."

The doctor filled his own cup and Huxley's. Phil answered, "Gone entirely, I'm reasonably certain. I thought it might be hysterical shock from the operation, but I tried him under hypnosis, and the results were still completely negative. Joan, you're a wonderful cook. Will you adopt me?"

"You're over twenty-one."

"I could easily have him certified as incompetent," volunteered Coburn.

"Single women aren't favored for adoption."

"Marry me, and it will be all right. We can both adopt him and you can cook for all of us."

"Well, I won't say that I won't and I won't say that I will, but I will say that it's the best offer I've had today. What were you guys talking about?"

"Make him put it in writing, Joan. We were talking about Valdez."

"Oh! You were going to run those last tests yesterday, weren't you? How did you come out?"

"Absolutely negative insofar as his special clairvoyance was concerned. It's gone."

"Hmm—How about the control tests?"

"The Humm-Wadsworth Temperament Test showed exactly the same profile as before the accident, within the inherent limits of accuracy of the technique. His intelligence quotient came within the technique limit, too. Association tests didn't show anything either. By all the accepted standards of neuropsychology he is the same individual, except in two respects; he's minus a chunk of his cortex, and he is no longer able to see around corners. Oh, yes, and he's annoyed at losing that ability."

After a pause she answered, "That's pretty conclusive, isn't it?"

Huxley turned to Coburn. "What do you think, Ben?"

"Well, I don't know. You are trying to get me to admit that that piece of grey matter I cut out of his head gave him the ability to see in a fashion not possible to normal sense organs and not accounted for by orthodox medical theory, aren't you?"

"I'm not trying to make you admit anything. I'm trying to find out something."

"Well, since you put it that way, I would say if we stipulate that all your primary data were obtained with care under properly controlled conditions—"

"They were."

"—and that you have exercised even greater care in obtaining your negative secondary data—"

"I have. Damn it, I tried for more than three weeks under all conceivable conditions."

"Then we have the ironclad conclusions, first—" He ticked them off on his fingers "—that this subject could see without the intervention of physical sense organs; and second, that this unusual, to put it mildly, ability was in some way related to a portion of his cerebrum in the dexter lobe."

"Bravo!" This was Joan's contribution.

"Thanks, Ben," acknowledged Phil. "I had reached the same conclusions, of course, but it's very encouraging to have someone else agree with me."

"WELL, now that you are there, where are you?"

"I don't know exactly. Let me put it this way; I got into psychology for the same reason a person joins a church—because he feels an overpowering need to understand himself and the world around him. When I was a young student, I thought modern psychology could tell me the answers, but I soon found out that the best psychologists didn't know a damn thing about the real core of the matter. Oh, I am not disparaging the work that has been done; it was badly needed and has been very useful in its way. None of 'em know what life is, what thought is, whether free will is a reality or an illusion, or whether that last question means anything. The best of 'em admit their ignorance; the worst of them make dogmatic assertions that are obvious absurdities—for example, some of the mechanistic behaviorists that think just because Pavlov could condition a dog to drool at the sound of a bell, they therefore knew all about how Bauer makes music!"

"It is certainly necessary to set up a pattern of conditioned reflexes in order to play the piano."

"Certainly it is, Ben, but it's equally certain that reflexes aren't the whole answer. Behaviorism doesn't account for the music welling up in him, nor for the overpowering drive to express it."

Joan, who had been lying quietly in the shade of the big liveoaks and listen-

ing, spoke up. "Ben, you are a brain surgeon, aren't you?"

"One of the best," certified Phil.

"You've seen a lot of brains, furthermore you've seen 'em while they were *alive*, which is more than most psychologists have. What do *you* believe thought is? What do you think makes us tick?"

He grinned at her. "You've got me, kid. I don't pretend to know. It's not my business; I'm just a tinker."

"That's just it." She sat up. "Give me a cigarette, Phil. I want to put in my two-bits worth. I've arrived just about where Phil is, but by a different road. My father wanted me to study law. I soon found out that I was more interested in the principles behind law and I changed over to the School of Philosophy. At the same time I was active in campus dramatics. At the end of my sophomore year I dropped out and played a season at the Pasadena Playhouse, and followed that with about a year on the road as ingenue in a stock company. I enjoyed acting and was doing pretty well at it, but I still wasn't entirely happy. I still wanted to *know*. So I quit and came back to school. But philosophy wasn't the answer. There really isn't anything *to* philosophy.

"Did you ever eat that Cotton Candy they sell at fairs? You know, the fluffy stuff they spin out of sugar and sell on a stick. Well, philosophy is like that—it looks as if it were really something, and it's awful pretty, and it tastes sweet, but when you go to bite it you can't get your teeth into it, and when you try to swallow, there isn't anything there.

"I was just about to get my Ph.D. in the School of Philosophy, when I chucked it and came to the science division and started taking courses in psychology. I thought they were on the right track, and that if I was a good little girl and patient, all would be revealed to me. Well, Phil has told us what that leads to. When that proved to be a dud, I began to think about studying medicine, or biology. You just gave the show away on that. Maybe I might as well go back to acting, or Church, Kitchen, and Kids. Maybe it was a mistake to teach women to read and write."

BEN laughed and answered, "This seems to be an experience meeting at the village church; I might as well make my confession. I guess most medical men start out with a desire to know all about man and what makes him tick, but we are almost certain to get sidetracked, as I did. It's a big field, the final answers are elusive, and there is always so much work that needs to be done right now, that we quit worrying about the final problems. I guess I'm as interested as I ever was in knowing what life, and thought, and so forth, really are, but I have to have an attack of insomnia to find time to worry about them. Phil, are you seriously proposing to tackle such things?"

"In a way, yes. I've been gathering data for some time on all sorts of phenomena that run contrary to orthodox psychological theory—all the junk that goes under the general name of metapsychics, telepathy, clairvoyance, so-called psychic manifestations, clairaudience, levitation, Yoga stuff, stigmata, anything of that sort I can find."

"Don't you find that most of that stuff can be explained in an ordinary fashion?"

"Quite a lot of it, sure. Then you can strain orthodox theory all out of shape and ignore the statistical laws of probability to account for most of the rest. Then by attributing anything that is left over to charlatanism, credulity, and self-hypnosis, and refusing to investigate it, you can go peacefully back to sleep."

"Occam's razor," murmured Joan.

"Huh?"

"William of Occam's Razor. It's a name for a principle in logic; whenever

two hypotheses both cover the facts, use the simpler of the two. When a conventional scientist has to strain his orthodox theories all out of shape, till they resemble something thought up by Rube Goldberg, to account for unorthodox phenomena, he's ignoring the principle of Occam's Razor. It's simpler to draw up a new hypothesis to cover all the facts than to strain an old one that was never intended to cover the non-conforming data. But scientists are more attached to their theories than they are to their wives and families."

"What sort of stuff," put in Ben, "have you dug up, Phil?"

"Quite a variety, some verified, some mere rumor, a little of it carefully checked under laboratory conditions, like Valdez. Of course, you've heard of all the stunts attributed to Yoga. Very little of it has been duplicated in the Western Hemisphere, which counts against it; nevertheless a lot of odd stuff in India has been reported by competent, cool-minded observers—telepathy, accurate soothsaying, clairvoyance, fire walking, and so forth."

"Hmm."

"Is the idea any more marvelous or incredible than the fact that you can cause your hand to scratch your head? We haven't any more idea of the actual workings of volition on matter in one case than in the other. A similar case is the Terra del Fuegans. They habitually slept on the ground, naked, even in zero weather. Now the body can't make any such adjustment in its economy. It hasn't the machinery; any physiologist will tell you so. A naked human being caught outdoors in zero weather must exercise or die. But the Terra del Fuegans didn't know about metabolic rates and such. They just slept, warm and cozy."

"So far you haven't mentioned anything close to home. If you are going to allow that much latitude, my Grandfather Stonebender had much more wonderful experiences."

"I'm coming to them. Don't forget Valdez."

"WHAT'S this about Ben's grandfather?" asked Joan.

"Joan, don't ever boast about anything in Ben's presence. You'll find that his Grandfather Stonebender did it faster, easier, and better."

A look of more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger shone out of Coburn's pale blue eyes. "Why, Phil, I'm surprised at you. If I weren't a Stonebender myself, and tolerant, I'd be inclined to resent that remark. But your apology is accepted."

"Well, to bring matters closer home, besides Valdez, there was a man in my home town, Springfield, Missouri, who had a clock in his head."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean he knew the exact time without looking at a clock. If your watch disagreed with him, your watch was wrong. Besides that, he was a lightning calculator—knew the answer instantly to the most complicated problems in arithmetic you cared to put to him. In other ways he was feeble-minded."

Ben nodded. "It's a common phenomenon—*idiots savants*."

"But giving it a name doesn't explain it. It's fairly common, but totally unexplained. Besides which, while a number of the people with erratic talents are feeble-minded, not all of them are. I believe that by far the greater per cent of them are not, but that we rarely hear of them because the intelligent ones are smart enough to know that they would be annoyed by the crowd, possibly persecuted, if they let the rest of us suspect that they were different. You know the old story about the pink monkey? Paint a monkey pink and put him back in a cage full of ordinary brown monkeys, and the brown

monkeys will kill him. Humans are just as bad."

Ben nodded again. "You got something there, Phil. Go ahead."

"There have been a lot of these people with impossible talents who were not subnormal in other ways and who were right close to home. Boris Sidis, for example—"

"He was that child prodigy, wasn't he? I thought he played out."

"Maybe. Personally, I think he grew smart and decided not to let the other monkeys know that he was different. In any case he had a lot of remarkable talents, in intensity, if not in kind. He must have been able to read a page of print just by glancing at it, and he undoubtedly had complete memory. Speaking of complete memory, how about Blind Tom, the Negro pianist who could play any piece of music he had ever heard once? Nearer home, there was this boy not so very many years ago who could play ping-pong blind-folded, or anything else, for which normal people require eyes. I checked him myself, and he could do it. And there was the Instantaneous Echo. He showed up about ten years ago."

"You never told me about him, Phil," commented Joan. "What could he do?"

"Nothing very useful, but pretty incredible. He could talk along with you, using your words and intonations, in any language, whether he knew that language or not. And he would keep pace with you so accurately that anyone listening wouldn't be able to tell the two of you apart. He could imitate your speech and words as immediately, as accurately, and as effortlessly as your shadow follows the movements of your body."

"Pretty fancy, what? And rather difficult to explain by behavioristic theory. Ever run across any cases of levitation, Phil?"

"You know the story they tell about Nijinsky?"

"Which one? I've heard a thousand."

"About him floating. There are literally thousands of people here and in Europe (unless they died in the Collapse) who testify that in his dance, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, he used to leap up into the air, pause for a while, then come down when he got ready. Call it mass hallucination, if you like—I didn't see it."

"Occam's Razor again," said Joan.

"So?"

"Mass hallucination is harder to explain than one man floating in the air for a few seconds. Mass hallucination not proved—mustn't infer it to get rid of a troublesome fact. It's comparable to the 'There ain't no sech animal' of the yokel who saw the rhinoceros for the first time."

"HOW about forerunners, and telepathy?"

"Well, telepathy is positively proved, though still unexplained, by Dr. Rhine's experiments. Of course a lot of people had observed it before then, with such frequency as to make questioning it unreasonable. Mark Twain, for example. He wrote about it fifty years before Rhine, with documentation and circumstantial detail. He wasn't a scientist, but he had a lot of hard common sense and shouldn't have been ignored. Forerunners are a little harder. Every one has heard dozens of stories of compelling hunches that came true, but they are impossible to follow up in most cases in any fashion amounting to evidence. You might try J. W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time* for a scientific record under controlled conditions of forerunners in dreams."

Coburn considered this. "Where does all this get you, Phil? You aren't just collecting Believe-it-or-nots?"

"No, I was definitely after something, just what I didn't know at first. I had to assemble a pile of data before I could

formulate a working hypothesis for directive research. I have one now."

"Well?"

"You really gave it to me—by operating on Valdez. I had begun to suspect sometime ago that these people with odd and apparently impossible mental and physical abilities were no different from the rest of us in any sense of abnormality, but that they had stumbled on potentialities inherent in all of us. Tell me, when you had Valdez' cranium open did you notice anything abnormal in its appearance?"

"No. Aside from the wound, it presented no special features."

"Very well. Yet when you excised that damaged portion, he no longer possessed his strange clairvoyant power. You took that chunk of his brain out of an uncharted area—no known function assigned to it. Now it is a primary datum of psychology and physiology that large areas of the brain have no *known* function. It doesn't seem reasonable that the most highly developed and highly specialized part of the body should have large areas with *no* function; it is more reasonable to assume that the functions are unknown. And yet men have had large pieces of their cortices cut out without any *apparent* loss in their mental powers, as long as the areas controlling the normal functions of the body were left untouched.

"Now in this one case, Valdez, we have established a direct connection between an uncharted area of the brain and an odd talent, to wit, clairvoyance. My working hypothesis comes directly from that: All normal people are potentially able to exercise all (or possibly most) of the odd talents we have referred to—telepathy, clairvoyance, special mathematical ability, special control over the body and its functions, and so forth. The potential ability to do these things is lodged in the unassigned areas of the brain."

Coburn pursed his lips. "Mmm—I don't know. If we all have these wonderful abilities, which isn't proved, how is it that we don't seem able to use them?"

"I admit I haven't proved anything—yet. This is a working hypothesis. But let me give you an analogy that may make it seem more probable that most of these powers would usually remain unused in most cases. These abilities are comparatively subtle; they aren't like sight, hearing, and touch which we can't avoid using from birth. They are more like the ability to talk, which has its own special centers in the brain from birth, *but which has to be trained into being*. Do you think a child raised exclusively by deaf-mutes would ever learn to talk? Of course not. To all outward appearance he would be a deaf-mute.

"Or take Helen Keller. She always had the potential ability to talk, but it took a teacher with subtle imagination and ingenuity to devise some way to get into contact with that ability and to train it into operative being. Otherwise she would never have talked, although her vocal cords were healthy and her speech centers in her brain unimpaired."

"I give up," conceded Coburn. "You set up an hypothesis and made it plausible. But how are you going to check it? I don't see any place to get hold of it. It's a very pretty speculation, but without a working procedure, it's just fantasy."

Huxley rolled over and stared unhappily up through the branches. "That's the rub. I've lost my best wild talent case. I don't know where to begin."

"But, Phil," protested Joan, "you want normal subjects, and then try to develop special abilities in them. I think it's wonderful. When do we start?"

"When do we start what?"

"On *me*, of course, you idiot. Take that ability to do lightning calculations, for example. If you could develop that in me, you'd be a magician. I got bogged down in first year algebra. I don't know

the multiplication tables even now!"

CHAPTER THREE

"Every Man His Own Genius"

"SHALL we get busy?" asked Phil.

"Oh, let's not," Joan objected. "Let's drink our coffee in peace and let dinner settle. We haven't seen Ben for two weeks. I want to hear what he's been doing up in San Francisco."

"Thanks, darling," the doctor answered, "but I'd much rather hear about the mad scientist and his Trilby."

"Trilby, hell," Huxley protested. "She's as onery as a hog on ice. However, we've got something to show you this time, Doc."

"Really? That's good. What?"

"Well, as you know, we didn't make much progress for the first couple of months. It was all uphill. Joan developed a fair telepathic ability, but it was erratic and unreliable. As for mathematical ability, she had learned her multiplication tables, except for a slight weakness on the seven's and nine's, but as for being a lightning calculator, she was a washout."

Joan jumped up, crossed between the men and the fireplace, and entered her tiny pullman kitchen. "I've got to scrape these dishes and put them in the dishwasher before the ants get at 'em. Talk loud, so I can hear you."

"What can Joan do now, Phil?"

"I'm not going to tell you. You wait and see. Joan! Where's the card table?"

"Back of the couch. No need to shout. I can hear plainly since I got my Foxy Grandma Stream-lined Ear Trumpet."

"Okay, wench, I found it. Cards in the usual place?"

"Yes. I'll be with you in a moment." She reappeared, whisking off a giddy kitchen apron, and sat down on the couch, hugging her knees. "The Great Gaga, the Ghoul of Hollywood, is ready. Sees all,

knows all, and tells a darn sight more. Fortune telling, teeth pulling, and refined entertainment for the entire family."

"Cut out the clowning. We'll start out with a little straight telepathy. Throw every thing else out of gear. Shuffle the cards, Ben."

Coburn did so. "Now what?"

"Deal 'em off, one at a time, letting you and me see 'em, but not Joan. Call 'em off, kid."

Ben dealt them out slowly. Joan commenced to recite in a sing-song voice, "Seven of diamonds; jack of hearts; ace of hearts; three of spades; ten of diamonds; six of clubs; nine of spades; eight of clubs—"

"Ben, that's the first time I've ever seen you look amazed."

"Right through the deck without a mistake. Grandfather Stonebender couldn't have done better."

"That's high praise, chum. Let's try a variation. I'll sit out this one. Don't let me see them. I don't know how it will work, as we never worked with anyone else. Try it."

A few minutes later Coburn put down the last card. "Perfect! not a mistake."

JOAN got up and came over to the table. "How come this deck has two tens of hearts in it?" She riffled through the deck, and pulled out one card. "Oh! You thought the seventh card was the ten of hearts; it was the ten of diamonds. See?"

"I guess I did," Ben admitted. "I'm sorry I threw you a curve. The light isn't any too good."

"Joan prefers artistic lighting effects to saving her eyes," explained Phil. "I'm glad it happened; it shows she was using telepathy, not clairvoyance. Now for a spot of mathematics. We'll skip the usual stunts like cube roots, instantaneous addition, logarithms of hyperbolic functions, and stuff. Take my word for it; she can do 'em. You can try her later on those simple tricks. Here's a little honey I shot in my own kitchen. It involves fast reading, complete memory, handling of unbelievable number of permutations and combinations, and mathematical investigation of alternatives. You play solitaire, Ben?"

"Sure."

"I want you to shuffle the cards thoroughly, then lay out a Canfield solitaire, dealing from left to right, then play it out, three cards at a time, going through the deck again and again, until you are stuck and can't go any farther."

"Okay. What's the gag?"

"After you have shuffled and cut, I want you to riffle the cards through once, holding them up so that Joan gets a quick glimpse of the index on each card. Then wait a moment."

Silently he did what he had been asked to do. Joan checked him. "You'll have to do it again, Ben. I saw only fifty-one."

"Two of them must have stuck together. I'll do it more carefully." He repeated it.

"Fifty-two that time. That's fine."

"Are you ready, Joan?"

"Yes, Phil. Take it down—hearts to the six, diamonds to the four, spades to the deuce, no clubs."

Coburn looked incredulous. "Do you mean that is the way this game is going to come out?"

"Try it and see."

He dealt the cards out from left to right, then played the game out slowly. Joan stopped him at one point. "No, play the king of heart's stack into that space, rather than the king of spades. The king of spades play would have gotten the ace of clubs out, but three less hearts would play out if you did so."

Coburn made no comment, but did as she told him to do. Twice more she stopped him and indicated a different choice of alternatives.

The game played out exactly as she had predicted.

Coburn ran his hand through his hair and stared at the cards.

"Joan," he said meekly, "does your head ever ache?"

"Not from doing that stuff. It doesn't seem to be any effort at all."

"YOU know," put in Phil, seriously, "there isn't any real reason why it should be a strain. So far as we know, thinking requires no expenditure of energy at all. A person ought to be able to think straight and accurately with no effort. I've a notion that it is faulty thinking that makes headaches."

"But how in the devil does she do it, Phil? It makes my head ache just to try to imagine the size of that problem, if it were worked out long-hand by conventional mathematics."

"I don't know how she does it. Neither does she."

"Then how did she *learn* to do it?"

"We'll take that up later. First, I want to show you our *piece de resistance.*"

"I can't take much more. I'm groggy now."

"You'll like this."

"Wait a minute, Phil. I want to try one of my own. How fast can Joan read?"

"As fast as she can see."

"Hmm—" The doctor hauled a sheaf of typewritten pages out of his inside coat pocket. "I've got the second draft of a paper I've been working on. Let's try Joan on a page of it. Okay, Joan?"

"Sure."

He separated an inner page from the rest and handed it to her. She glanced at it and handed it back at once.

He looked puzzled and said, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Check me as I read back." She started in a rapid singsong, "Page four. —now according to Cunningham, fifth edition, page 547: Another strand of fibres, videlicet, the fasciculus spinocerebellaris (posterior), prolonged upwards in the lateral funiculus of the medulla spinallis, gradually leaves this portion of the medulla oblongata. This tract lies on the surface, and is—"

"That's enough, Joan. Hold it. God knows how you did it, but you read and memorized that page of technical junk in a split-second." He grinned slyly. "But your pronunciation was a bit spotty. Grandfather Stonebender's would have been perfect."

She pretended to be miffed. "What can you expect? I don't know what half the words mean."

Ben's face was very serious. "Joan, how did you learn to do all this stuff?"

"Truthfully, Doctor, I don't know. It's something like learning to ride a bicycle —you take one spill after another and get holes in the knees of all your stockings and never seem to make any progress, then one day you get on and just ride away, easy as you please. And in a week you are riding without handlebars and trying the stunts you've seen the other kids do. It's been like that—I knew what I wanted to do, and one day I could."

BEN maintained a puzzled silence and permitted Phil to lead him away to a little desk in the corner. "Joan, can we use any drawer? Okay, Ben, pick out a drawer in this desk, remove any articles you wish. Then, without looking into the drawer, stir up the contents and remove a few articles and drop them into another drawer. I want to eliminate the possibility of telepathy."

"Phil, don't worry about my housekeeping. My large staff of secretaries will be only too happy to straighten out that desk after you get through playing with it."

"Don't stand in the way of science, little one. Besides," he added, glancing into a drawer, "this desk obviously hasn't been straightened for at least six months. A little more stirring up won't hurt it."

When the doctor had complied and closed the drawer, Phil continued, "Better use pencil and paper on this one, Joan. First list everything you see in the drawer, then draw a little sketch to show approximate locations and arrangement."

"Okay." She sat down at the desk and commenced to write rapidly:

One large black leather handbag

Six-inch ruler

Ben stopped her. "Wait a minute. This is all wrong. I would have noticed anything as big as a handbag."

She wrinkled her brow. "Which drawer did you say?"

"The second on the right."

"I thought you said the top drawer."

"Well, perhaps I did."

She started again:

Brass paper knife

Six assorted pencils and a red pencil

Thirteen rubber bands

Pearl-handled penknife

"That must be your knife, Ben. It's very pretty; why haven't I seen it before?"

"I bought it in San Francisco. Good God, girl. You haven't seen it *yet.*"

One paper of matches, advertising the Sir Francis Drake Hotel

Eight letters and two bills

Two ticket stubs, the Follies Burlesque Theatre—"Doctor, I'm surprised at you."

"Get on with your knitting."

"Provided you promise to take me the next time you go."

One fever thermometer with a pocket clip

Art gum and a typewriter eraser

One toothbrush—"What's that doing there?"

"To clean typewriter type, idiot."

Three keys, assorted

One lipstick, medium

A scratch pad and some file cards, used on one side

One small brown paper sack containing one pair stockings, size nine, shade Creole

—"I'd forgotten that I had bought them; I searched all through the house for a decent pair this morning."

"Why didn't you just use your X-ray eyes, Mrs. Houdini?"

She looked startled. "Do you know, it just didn't occur to me."

"Anything else in the drawer?"

"Nothing but a box of notepaper. Just a sec; I'll make the sketch." She sketched busily for a couple of minutes, her tongue between her teeth, her eyes darting from the paper toward the closed drawer and back again.

"Do you have to look in the direction of the drawer to see inside it?"

"No, but it helps. It makes me dizzy to *see* a thing when I am looking away from it."

The contents and arrangement of the drawer were checked and found to be exactly as Joan had stated they were. Doctor Coburn sat quietly, making no comment, when they had finished. Phil, slightly irked at his friend's lack of demonstrativeness, spoke to him.

"Well, Ben, what did you think of it?"

"You know what I thought of it. You've proved your theory right up to the hilt—but I'm thinking about some of the implications, some of the possibilities. I *think* we've just been handed the greatest boon a surgeon ever had to work with. Joan, can you see inside a human body?"

"I don't know. I've never—"

"Look at me."

She stared at him for a silent moment. "Why—why, I can see your heart beat! I can see—"

"Phil, can you teach me to see the way she does?"

Huxley rubbed his nose. "I don't know. Maybe—"

JOAN bent over the big chair in which the doctor was seated. "Won't he go under, Phil?"

"Hell, no. I've tried everything but

tapping his skull with a bungstarter. I don't believe there's any brain there to hypnotize."

"Don't be pettish. Let's try again. How do you feel, Ben?"

"All right, but wide awake. I can't seem to relax."

"I'm going out of the room this time. Maybe I'm a distracting factor. Now be a good boy and go sleepy-bye." She left them.

Five minutes later Huxley called out to her, "Come on back in, kid. He's under this time."

She came in and looked at Coburn where he lay sprawled in her big easy chair, quiet, eyes half closed.

"Ready for me?" she asked, turning to Huxley.

"Yes. Get ready." She lay down on the couch. "You know what I want; get in rapport with Ben as soon as you go under. Need any persuasion to get to sleep?"

"No."

"Very well, then—Sleep!"

She became quiet, lax.

"Are you under, Joan?"

"Yes, Phil."

"Can you reach Ben's mind?"

A short pause: "Yes."

"What do you find?"

"Nothing. It's like an empty room, but friendly. Wait a moment—he greeted me."

"What did he say?"

"Just a greeting. It wasn't in words."

"Can you hear me, Ben?"

"Sure, Phil."

"You two are together?"

"Yes. Yes, indeed."

"Listen to me, both of you. I want you to wake up slowly, remaining in rapport. Then Joan is to teach Ben how to perceive that which is not seen. Can you do it?"

"Yes, Phil, we can."

It was just as though one voice had spoken.

CHAPTER FOUR

Holiday

"FRANKLY, Mr. Huxley, I can't understand your non-co-operative attitude." The president of Western University let the stare from his slightly bulging eyes rest on the second button of Phil's vest. "You have been given every facility for sound useful research along lines of proven worth. Your program of instructing has been kept light in order that you might make use of your undoubted ability. You have been acting chairman of your sub-department this past semester. Yet instead of profiting by your unusual opportunities, you have, by your own admission, been, shall we say, frittering away your time in the childish pursuit of old wives' tales and silly superstitions. Bless me, man, I don't understand it!"

Phil answered, with controlled exasperation, "But Doctor Brinckley, if you would permit me to show you—"

The president interposed a palm. "Please, Mr. Huxley. It is not necessary to go over that ground again. One more thing—it has come to my attention that you have been interfering in the affairs of the medical school."

"The medical school! I haven't set foot inside it in weeks."

"It has come to me from unquestioned authority that you have influenced Doctor Coburn to disregard the advice of the staff diagnosticians in performing surgical operations."

Huxley maintained his voice at toneless politeness. "Let us suppose for the moment that I have influenced Doctor Coburn—I do not concede the point—has there been any case in which Coburn's refusal to follow diagnosis has failed to be justified by the subsequent history of the case?"

"That is beside the point. I can't have

my staff from one school interfering in the affairs of another school. You see the justice of that, I am sure."

"I do not admit that I have interfered. In fact, I deny it."

"I am afraid I shall have to be the judge of that." Brinckley rose from his desk and came around to where Huxley stood. "Now, Mr. Huxley—May I call you Philip?—I like to have my juniors in our institution think of me as a friend. I want to give you the same advice that I would give to my son. The semester will be over in a day or two. I think you need a vacation. The board has made some little difficulty over renewing your contract inasmuch as you have not yet completed your doctorate. I took the liberty of assuring them that you would submit a suitable thesis this coming academic year, and I feel sure that you can if you will only devote your efforts to sound, constructive work. You take your vacation, and when you come back you can outline your proposed thesis to me. I am quite sure the board will make no difficulty about your contract then."

"I had intended to write up the results of my current research for my thesis."

Brinckley's brows raised in polite surprise. "Really? But that is out of the question, my boy, as you know. You do need a vacation. Good-by, then. If I do not see you again before commencement, let me wish you a pleasant holiday now."

WHEN a stout door separated him from the president, Huxley dropped his pretence of good manners and hurried across the campus, ignoring students and professors alike. He found Ben and Joan waiting for him at their favorite bench.

He flopped down on the seat beside them. Neither of the men spoke, but Joan was unable to control her impatience. "Well, Phil? What did the old fossil have to say?"

"Gimme a cigarette." Ben handed him a pack and waited. "He didn't say much, just threatened me with the loss of my job and the ruination of my academic reputation if I didn't knuckle under and be his tame dog—all in the politest of terms, of course."

"But didn't you offer to bring me in and show him the progress you had already made?"

"I didn't bring your name into it; it was useless. He knew who you were well enough—he made a sidelong reference to the inadvisability of young instructors seeing female students socially except under formal, fully chaperoned conditions—talked about the high moral tone of the university, and our obligation to the public!"

"Why, the dirty-minded old so-and-so! I'll tear him apart for that!"

"Take it easy, Joan." Ben Coburn's voice was mild and thoughtful. "Just how did he threaten you, Phil?"

"He refused to renew my contract at this time. He intends to keep me on tenterhooks all summer. Then if I come back in the fall and make a noise like a rabbit, he might renew—if he feels like it. Damn him! The thing that got me the sorest was a suggestion that I was slipping and needed a rest."

"What are you going to do?"

"Look for a job, I guess. I've got to eat."

"Teaching job?"

"I suppose so, Ben."

"Your chances aren't very good, are they, without a formal release from Western? They can blacklist you pretty effectively. You've actually got about as much freedom in the matter as a professional ball player."

Phil looked glumly at his feet and said nothing.

Ben said thoughtfully, "You know, Phil, the old boy's idea about a vacation wasn't too stupid. I could do with one myself."

"Anything in particular in mind?"

"Why, yes, more or less. I've been out here seven years and never really seen the state. I'd like to start out and drive, with no particular destination in mind. We could go on up past Sacramento and into northern California. They say it's magnificent country up there. We could take in the High Sierras and the Big Trees on the way back."

"That certainly sounds inviting."

"You could take along your research notes and we could talk about your ideas as we drove. If you decided you wanted to write up some phase, we would just lay over while you did it."

Phil stuck out his hand. "It's a deal, Ben. When do we start?"

"As soon as the term closes."

"Let's see—we ought to be able to get underway late Friday afternoon, then. Which car will we use, yours or mine?"

"My coupe ought to be about right. It has lots of baggage space."

Joan, who had followed the conversation with interest, broke in on them. "Why use your car, Ben? Three people can't be comfortable in a coupe."

"Three people? You aren't going, bright eyes."

"So? That's what you think. You can't leave me behind."

"Now Joan, it would look like the devil for you to be barging about the country with a couple of men—"

"Sissies! Tissyprissles! Pantywaists! Worried about your precious reputations."

"No, we're not. We're worried about yours."

"It won't wash. No girl that lives alone has any reputation. She can be as pure as Ivory soap and the cats on the campus, both sexes, will take her to pieces anyway. What are you so scared of? We aren't going to cross any state lines."

Coburn and Huxley exchanged the secret look that men employ when confronted by the persistence of an unreasonable woman.

"LOOKOUT, Joan!" A big red Santa Fe bus took the shoulder on the opposite side of the highway and slithered past. Joan switched the tail of the grey sedan around an oil tanker truck and trailer on their own side of the road before replying. When she did, she turned her head to speak directly to Phil, who was riding in the back seat.

"What's the matter, Phil?"

"You darn near brought us into a head-on collision with about twenty tons of the Santa Fe's best rolling stock!"

"Don't be nervous; I've been driving since I was sixteen and I've never had an accident."

"Anyhow," Phil went on, "can't you keep your eyes on the road when you drive? That's not too much to ask, is it?"

"I don't need to watch the road. Look." She turned her head far around and showed him that her eyes were jammed shut. The needle of the speedometer hovered around eighty.

"Joan! Please!"

She opened her eyes and faced front once more. "But I don't have to look in order to see. You taught me that yourself, Smarty. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, yes, but I never thought you'd apply it to driving a car."

"Why not? I'm the safest driver you ever saw; I can see everything that's on the road, even around a blind curve. If I need to, I read the other drivers' minds to see what they are going to do next."

"She's right, Phil. The few times I've paid attention to her driving she's been doing just exactly what I would have done in the same circumstances. That's why I haven't been nervous."

"All right. All right," Phil answered, "but would you two supermen keep in mind that there is a slightly nervous ordinary mortal in the back seat who can't see around corners?"

"I'll be good," said Joan soberly.

"I'm interested," resumed Ben, "in what you said about not looking toward anything you wanted to see. I can't do it too satisfactorily. I remember once you said it made you dizzy to look away and still use direct perception."

"It used to, Ben, but I got over it, and so will you. It's just a matter of breaking old habits. To me, every direction is in 'front'—all around and up and down. I can focus my attention in any direction, or two or three directions at once. I can even pick a point of view away from where I am physically, and look at the other side."

"YOU two make me feel like the mother of the Ugly Duckling," said Phil bitterly. "Will you still think of me kindly when you have passed beyond human communication?"

"Poor Phil!" exclaimed Joan, with sincere sympathy in her voice. "You taught us, but no one has bothered to teach you. Tell you what, Ben, let's stop tonight at an auto camp, pick a nice quiet one on the outskirts of Sacramento, and spend a couple of days doing for Phil what he has done for us."

"That's mighty white of you, pardner," Phil conceded. It was obvious that he was pleased and mollified. "After you get through with me, will I be able to drive a car on two wheels, too?"

"Why not learn to levitate?" Ben suggested. "It's simpler—less expensive and nothing to get out of order."

"Maybe we will some day," returned Phil, quite seriously. "There's no telling where this line of investigation may lead."

"Yeah, you're right," Ben answered him with equal sobriety. "I'm getting so that I can believe seven impossible things before breakfast. What were you saying just before we passed that oil tanker?"

"I was just trying to lay before you an idea I've been mulling over in my mind the past several weeks. It's a big idea, so big that I can hardly believe it myself."

"Well, spill it."

Phil commenced checking points off on his fingers. "We've proved, or tended to prove, that the normal human mind has powers previously unsuspected, haven't we?"

"Tentatively, yes. It looks that way."

"Powers way beyond any that the race as a whole makes regular use of?"

"Yes, surely. Go on."

"And we have reason to believe that these powers exist, have their being, by virtue of certain areas of the brain to which functions were not previously assigned by physiologists? That is to say, they have organic basis, just as the eye and the sight centers in the brain are the organic basis for normal sight?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, what is the evolutionary course of any function, and any organ? You can trace the evolution of any organ from a simple beginning to a complex, highly developed form. The organ develops through use. In an evolutionary sense, function begets organ."

"Yes. That's elementary."

"Don't you see what tremendous thing that implies?"

Coburn looked puzzled for a moment or two; then a look of comprehension spread over his face. Phil continued, with delight in his voice, "You see it, too? The conclusion is inescapable: There must have been a time when the entire race used all these strange powers as easily as they heard, or saw or smelled. And there must have been a long, long period—hundreds of thousands, probably millions of years—during which these powers were developed *as a race.* Individuals couldn't do it, any more than I could grow wings. It had to be done racially, over a long period of time. These strange powers are vestigal, hangovers from a time when the whole race had 'em and used 'em."

PHIL stopped talking, and Ben did not answer him, but sat in a brown study while some ten miles spun past. Finally Ben said, a little defensively, 'But, brother, you've sure raised hell with modern anthropology. How about it? You can't ignore it."

"Well, for every distinguished anthropologist you'll find one equally distinguished who will call him a diamond-studded liar. They can't agree on the simplest elements of their science. In the second place, there isn't a corporal's guard of really decent exhibits to back up their assertions about the career of mankind on the way up—his family tree—missing link stuff. I never saw so much stew from one oyster. They write book after book and what have they got to go on?—The Dawson Man, the Pekin Man, the Heidelberg Man and a couple of others. And those aren't complete skeletons—a damaged skull, a couple of teeth, maybe another bone or two."

"Oh now, Phil, there were lots of specimens found of the Cro-Magnon men."

"Yes, but they were true men, as highly evolved as you or me. I'm talking about submen, our evolutionary predecessors. You see, I was trying to check my hypothesis—prove myself wrong. If man's ascent had been a long steady climb, up from the slime of the sea bottom, through reptiles and mammals to the submen . . . submen into savages, savages to barbarians, barbarians perfecting their cultures into civilization . . . all this with only minor setbacks of a few centuries, or a few thousand years at the most . . . and our present degree of culture, and mental and physical complexity, the highest the race has ever reached. . . . If all this was true, then my idea was wrong.

"You follow me, don't you? The internal evidence of the brain proves that mankind, sometime in its lost history, climbed to heights undreamed of today. In some fashion the race slipped down from those heights. And all of this happened so long ago that we have found no record of it anywhere. These brutish submen that the anthropologists set such store by *can't* have been our ancestors, for man had evolved to his highest perfection even before their time.

The *can't* be our ancestors; they are too new, too primitive, too young; they allow for no time for the race to develop these strange abilities whose existence I have proved.

"Either anthropology is all wet, or Joan can't do the things which we have seen her do."

The center of the controversy said nothing. She sat at the wheel, as the big car sped along, her eyes closed against the slanting rays of the setting sun, seeing the road with an inner impossible sight.

FIVE days were spent in coaching Huxley, and a sixth on the open road. Sacramento lay far behind them. For the past hour Mount Shasta had been visible from time to time through openings in the trees. Phil brought the car to a grinding stop on a turnout parking shoulder built out from the pavement of U. S. Highway 99. He turned to his passengers.

"All out, troops," he said. "Catch yourselves a slice of scenery."

For some moments the three stood and stared over the canyon of the Sacramento River at Mount Shasta, thirty miles away. It was sweater weather and the air was as clear as a child's gaze. The peak was framed by two of the great fir trees which marched down the side of the canyon. Snow still lay on the slopes of the cone and straggled down as far as the timberline, which was sharp and level as if cut by an architect.

Joan muttered something to herself. Ben turned his head. "What did you say, Joan?"

"Me? Nothing—I was saying over a bit of poetry to myself."

"What was it?"

"Tietjens' *Most Sacred Mountain:*

" 'Space, and the twelve clean winds are here;
And with them broods eternity—a swift white peace, a presence manifest.
The rhythm ceases here. Time has no place. This is the end that has no end.' "

Phil cleared his throat and rather self-consciously broke the silence. "I think I see what you mean."

Joan faced them.

"Boys," she stated, "I am going to climb Mount Shasta."

Ben studied her dispassionately.

"Joan," he pronounced, "you are full of hop."

"I mean it. I didn't say you were going to—I said I was."

"But we are responsible for your safety and welfare, and I for one don't relish the thought of a fourteen thousand foot climb."

"You are not responsible for my safety; I'm a free citizen. Anyhow, a climb wouldn't hurt you any; it would help to get rid of some of that fat you've been storing up against winter."

"Why," inquired Phil, "are you so determined so suddenly to make this climb?"

"It's really not a sudden decision, Phil. Ever since we left Los Angeles I've had a recurring dream that I was climbing, climbing, up to some high place, and that I was very happy because of it. Today I know that it was Shasta I was climbing."

"How do you know it?"

"I know it."

"Ben, what do you think?

The doctor picked up a granite pebble and shied it out in the general direction of the river. He waited for it to come to rest several hundred feet down the slope.

"I guess," he said, "we'd better buy some hobnailed boots."

PHIL paused and the two behind him on the narrow path were forced to stop, too.

"Joan," he asked, with a worried tone, "is this the way we came?"

They huddled together, icy wind cutting at their faces like rusty razor blades and gusts of snow eddying about them and stinging their eyes, while Joan considered her answer.

"I think so," she ventured at last. "But even with my eyes closed this snow makes everything look different."

"That's my trouble, too. I guess we pulled a boner when we decided against a guide. But who would have thought that a beautiful summer day could end up in a snowstorm?"

Ben stamped his feet and slapped his hands together.

"Let's get going," he urged. "Even if this is the right road, we've got the worst of it ahead of us before we reach the rest cabin. Don't forget that stretch of glacier we crossed."

"I wish I could forget it," Phil answered him soberly. "I don't fancy the prospect of crossing it in this weather."

With Ben now in the lead they resumed their cautious progress, heads averted to the wind, eyes half closed. Ben checked them again after a couple of hundred yards.

"Careful, gang," he warned. "The path is almost gone here, and it's slippery." He went forward a few steps. "It's rather—" They heard him make a violent effort to recover his balance, then fall heavily.

"Ben! Ben!" Phil called out, "are you all right?"

"I guess so," he gasped. "I gave my left leg an awful bang. Be careful." He groaned.

They saw that he was on the ground, hanging part way over the edge of the path. Cautiously they approached until they were alongside him. "Lend me a hand, Phil. Easy, now."

Phil helped him wiggle back onto the path. "Can you stand up?"

"I'm afraid not. My left leg gave me the devil when I had to move just now. Take a look at it, Phil. No, don't bother to take the boot off; look right through it."

"Of course. I forgot." Phil studied the limb for a moment. "It's pretty bad, fella—a fracture of the shin bone about four inches below the knee."

Coburn whistled a couple of bars of *Suwannee River,* then said, "Isn't that just too, too lovely? Simple or compound fracture?"

"Seems like a clean break, Ben."

"Not that it matters much one way or the other just now. What do we do next?"

Joan answered him. "We must build a litter and get you down the mountain!"

"Spoken like a true girl scout. Have you figured how you and Phil can maneuver a litter, with me in it, over that stretch of ice?"

"We'll *have* to—somehow." But her voice lacked confidence.

"It won't work, kid. You two will have to straighten me out and bed me down, then go on down the mountain and stir out a rescue party with proper equipment. I'll get some sleep while you're gone. I'd appreciate it if you'd leave me some smokes."

"No!" Joan protested. "We won't leave you here alone."

Phil added his objections. "Your plan is as bad as Joan's, Ben. It's all very well to talk about sleeping until we get back, but you know as well as I do that you would die of exposure if you spent a night like this on the ground with no protection."

"I'll just have to chance it. What better plan can you suggest?"

"Wait a minute. Let me think." He sat down on the ledge beside his friend and pulled at his left ear. "This is the best I can figure out: We'll have to get you to some place that is a little more sheltered, and build a fire to keep you warm. Joan can stay with you and keep the fire going while I go down after help."

"That's all right," put in Joan, "except that I will be the one to go after help. You couldn't find your way in the dark and the snow, Phil. You know yourself that your direct perception isn't reliable as yet. You'd get lost."

Both men protested. "Joan, you're not going to start off alone."—"We can't permit that, Joan."

"That's a lot of gallant nonsense. Of course I'm going."

"GOOD EVENING, friends." A tall, elderly man stood on the ledge behind them. Steady blue eyes regarded them from under shaggy white eyebrows. He was smooth shaven

but a mane of white hair matched the eyebrows. Joan thought he looked like Mark Twain.

Coburn recovered first.

"Good evening," he answered. "If it is a good evening, which I doubt."

The stranger smiled with his eyes. "My name is Ambrose, ma'am. Your friend is in need of some assistance. If you will permit me, sir—" He knelt down and examined Ben's leg, without removing the boot. Presently he raised his head. "This will be somewhat painful. I suggest, son, that you go to sleep." Ben smiled at him, closed his eyes, and gave evidence by his slow, regular breathing that he was asleep.

The man who called himself Ambrose slipped away into the shadows. Joan tried to follow him with perception, but this she found curiously hard to do. He returned in a few minutes with several straight sticks which he broke into uniform lengths of about twenty inches. These he proceeded to bind firmly to Ben's left shin with a roll of cloth which he had removed from his trouser pocket.

When he was satisfied that the primitive splint was firm, he picked Coburn up in his arms, handling the not inconsiderable mass as if it were a child.

"Come," he said.

They followed him without a word, back the way they had come, single file through the hurrying snowflakes. Five hundred yards, six hundred yards; then he took a turn that had not been on the path followed by Joan and the two men, and strode confidently away in the gloom. Joan noticed that he was wearing a light cotton shirt with neither coat nor sweater, and wondered that he had come so far with so little protection against the weather.

He spoke to her over his shoulder, "I like cold weather, ma'am."

He walked between two large boulders, apparently disappeared into the side of the mountain. They followed him and found themselves in a passageway which led diagonally into the living rock. They turned a corner and were in an octagonal living room, high-ceilinged and panelled in some mellow, light-colored wood. It was softly illuminated by indirect lighting, but possessed no windows. One side of the octagon was a fireplace with a generous hearth in which a wood fire burned hospitably. There was no covering on the flagged floor, but it was warm to the feet.

The old man paused with his burden and indicated the comfortable fittings of the room—three couches, old-fashioned heavy chairs, a chaise-longue—with a nod. "Be seated, friends, and make yourselves comfortable. I must see that your companion is taken care of; then we will find refreshment for you." He went out through a door opposite the one by which they had entered, still carrying Coburn in his arms.

When Ambrose returned some ten minutes later he found them blissfully toasting their tired feet before the fire. He was bearing a tray from which he served them big steaming bowls of onion soup, hard rolls, apple pie, and strong black tea. While doing so he stated, "Your friend is resting. There is no need to see him until tomorrow. When you have eaten, you will find sleeping rooms in the passageway, with what you need for your immediate comfort." He indicated the door from which he had just come. "No chance to mistake them; they are the lighted rooms immediately at hand. I will bid you good night now." He went silently away.

CHAPTER FIVE

"—through a Glass, Darkly"

WHEN Phil entered the living room the next morning he found a small table set with a sound, a very sound breakfast for three. While he was lifting plate covers in a saliva-stirring

preliminary reconnaissance and wondering whether good manners required him to wait until joined by others before commencing to breakfast, Joan entered the room. He looked up.

"Oh! It's you. Good morning, and stuff. They set a proper table here. Look." He lifted a plate cover. "Did you sleep well?"

"Like a corpse." She joined his investigations. "They do understand food, don't they? When do we start?"

"When number three gets here, I guess. Those aren't the clothes you had on last night."

"Like it?" She turned around slowly with a swaying mannequin walk. She had on a pearl grey gown that dropped to her toes. It was high waisted; two silver cords crossed between her breasts and encircled her waist, making a girdle. She was shod in silver sandals. There was an air of ancient days about the whole costume.

"It's swell. Why is it a girl always looks prettier in simple clothes?"

"Simple—hmmf! If you can buy this for a hundred and twenty-five dollars on Hollywood Boulevard, I'd like to have the address of the shop."

"Hello, troops." Ben stood in the doorway. They both stared at him. "What's the trouble—aren't I welcome?"

Phil ran his eye down Ben's frame. "How's your leg, Ben?"

"I wanted to ask you about that. How long have I been out? The leg's all well. Wasn't it broken after all?"

"How about it, Phil?" Joan seconded. "You examined it—I didn't."

Phil pulled his ear. "It was broken, or I've gone completely screwy. Let's have a look at it."

Ben slid up his pajama leg, and exposed a shin that was pink and healthy. He pounded it with his fist. "See that? Not even a bruise."

"Hmm—You haven't been out long, Ben. Just since last night. Maybe ten or eleven hours."

"Huh?"

"That's right."

"Impossible."

"Maybe so. Let's eat breakfast."

THEY ate in thoughtful silence, each under the pressing necessity of taking stock and reaching some reasonable re-orientation. Toward the end of the meal they all happened to look up at once

and Phil broke the uncomfortable silence.

"Well, how about it?"

"Seriously, some things have happened which require explanation. Let's tick 'em off: One; I break a leg last night; it's all healed this morning."

"Wait a minute— Are we sure you broke your leg?"

"I'm sure. Furthermore, our host acted as if he thought so too—else why did he bother to carry me? Two, our host has direct perception, or an uncanny knowledge of the mountainside."

"Speaking of direct perception," said Joan, "have either of you tried to look around you and size up the place?"

"No, why?"—"Neither have I."

"Don't bother to. I tried, and it can't be done. I can't perceive past the walls of the room."

"Hmm—we'll put that down as point three. Four, our host says that his name is Ambrose. That is his first name. I know. My dad had a picture of him in our living room at home. He was a well-known artist, who disappeared sometime before I was born. At the time of the outbreak of the first World War, as I recall it. If this is the same man, he must be over a hundred years old."

"He didn't look that old by forty years."

"Well, we'll put it down for what it's worth. Point five—we'll make this one an omnibus point—why does our host live up here? How come this strange mixture of luxury hotel and cliff dweller's cave anyhow? How can one old man run such a joint? Say, have either of you seen anyone else around the place?"

"I haven't," said Ben. "Someone woke me, but I think it was Ambrose."

"I have," offered Joan. "It was a woman that woke me. She offered me this dress."

"Ambrose's wife, maybe?"

"I don't think so. She wasn't more than thirty-five. I didn't really get acquainted. She was gone before I was wide awake."

Phil looked from Joan to Ben. "Well, what have we got? Add it up and give us an answer."

"GOOD MORNING, friends!" It was Ambrose, standing in the doorway, his rich, virile voice resounding around the many-sided room. The three started as if caught doing something improper.

Coburn recovered first. He stood up and bowed. "Good morning, sir. I believe that you saved my life. I hope to be able to show my gratitude."

The older man bowed formally. "What service I did I enjoyed doing, sir. I hope that you are all rested."

"Yes, thank you, and pleasantly filled from your table."

"That is good. Now, if I may join you, we can discuss what you wish to do next. Perhaps you would like to see the rest of our home and meet the other members of our household?"

"Oh, I think that would be lovely!" Joan exclaimed.

"It will be my pleasure, ma'am."

"As a matter of fact, sir—" Phil leaned forward a little, his face and manner serious "—we are quite anxious to see more of your place here, and to know more about you. We were speaking of it when you came in."

"Curiosity is natural and healthy. Please ask any question you wish."

"Well—" Phil plunged in—"Ben had a broken leg last night. Or didn't he? It's well this morning."

"He did indeed have a broken leg. It was healed in the night."

Coburn cleared his throat. "I am a physician and surgeon, but my knowledge does not extend to such healing as that. Will you tell me more about it?"

"Certainly. You are familiar with regeneration as practiced by the lower life forms. The principle used is the same, but it is consciously controlled by the will and

the rate of healing is accelerated. I placed you in hypnosis last night, then surrendered control to one of our surgeons, who directed your mind in exerting its own powers to heal its body."

COBURN looked baffled. Ambrose continued, "There is really nothing startling about it. The mind and will have always the possibility of complete domination over the body. Our operator simply directs your will to master its body. The technique is simple; you may learn it, if you wish. I assure you that to learn it is easier than to explain it in our cumbersome and imperfect language."

He saw Joan nodding her head in agreement.

Ambrose went on in his gentle, resonant voice, "Was there any other matter troubling any one of you?"

"One more question—this is rather personal; you may ignore it if you like. Are you Ambrose James, the artist, who disappeared a good many years ago?"

"I am. I first came up here in 1880 in search of a cure for asthma. I retired here in 1914 because I wished to avoid direct contact with the tragic world events which I saw coming and was powerless to stop." He spoke with some reluctance, as if the subject were distasteful, and turned the conversation. "Perhaps you would like to meet some of my friends now?"

THE apartments extended for a hundred yards along the face of the mountain and for unmeasured distances into the mountain. The thirty odd persons in residence were far from crowded; there were many rooms not in use. In the course of the morning James introduced them to most of the inhabitants.

They seemed to be of all sorts and ages and of several nationalities. Most of them were occupied in one way or another, usually with some form of research, or with creative art. At least James assured them in several cases that research was in progress—cases in which no apparatus, no recording devices, nothing was evident to indicate scientific research.

Once they were introduced to a group of three, two women and a man, who were surrounded by the physical evidence of their work—biological research. But the circumstances were still confusing; two of the trio sat quietly by, doing nothing, while the third labored at a bench. James explained that they were doing some delicate experiments in the possibility of activating artificial colloids.

"Are the other two observing the work?" Ben inquired.

James shook his head. "Oh, no. They are all three engaged actively in the work, but at this particular stage they find it expedient to let three brains in rapport direct one set of hands."

Rapport, it developed, was the usual method of collaboration. James had led them into a room occupied by six persons. One or two of them looked up and nodded, but did not speak. James motioned for the three to come away. "They were engaged in a particularly difficult piece of reconstruction; it would not be polite to disturb them."

"But," Phil commented, "two of them were playing chess."

"Yes. They did not need that part of their brains, so they left it out of rapport. Nevertheless they were very busy, I can assure you."

It was easier to see what the creative artists were doing. In two instances, however, their methods were startling. James had taken them to the studio of a little gnome of a man, a painter in oil, who was introduced as Charles, without qualification. He seemed quite glad to see them and chatted vivaciously, without ceasing his work. He was doing, with meticulous realism, but with a highly romantic effect, a study of a young girl dancing, a

wood nymph, against a pine forest background.

The young people each made appropriate appreciative comments, Coburn observed that it was remarkable that he should be able to be so accurate in his anatomical detail without the aid of a model.

"But I have a model," he answered. "She was here last week. See?" He glanced toward the empty model's throne. Coburn and his companions followed the glance, and saw, poised on the throne, a young girl, obviously the model for the picture, frozen in the action of the painting. She was as real as bread and butter. Charles glanced away. The model's throne was again vacant.

The second incident was not so dramatic, but still less comprehensible. They had met, and chatted with a Mrs. Draper, a comfortable, matronly soul, who knitted and rocked as they talked.

After they had left her Phil inquired about her.

"She is possibly our most able and talented artist," James told him.

"In what field?"

"I don't believe I can tell you adequately at this time She composes moods —arranges emotional patterns in harmonic sequences. It's our most advanced and our most completely human form of art, and yet, until you have experienced it, it is very difficult for me to tell you about it?"

"How is it possible to *arrange* emotions?"

"Your great grandfather no doubt thought it impossible to record music. We have a technique for it. You will understand later."

The three talked it over that night in the living room they had first entered. This suite had been set aside for their use, and Ambrose had left them with the simple statement that he would call on them on the morrow.

THEY felt a pressing necessity to exchange views, and yet each was reluctant to express opinion. Joan broke the silence.

"What kind of people are these?" she said. "They make me feel as if I were a child who had wandered in where adults were working, but that they were too polite to put me out."

"Speaking of working—there's something odd about the way they work. I don't mean what it is they do—that's odd, too, and I don't pretend to understand half of what they do. It's something else —something about their attitude, maybe, or the tempo at which they work."

"I know what you mean, Ben," Joan agreed. "They are busy all the time, and yet they act as if they had all eternity to finish whatever it is they are doing. James was like that when he was strapping up your leg." She turned to Phil. "What are you frowning about?"

"I don't know. There is something else about these people, something we haven't mentioned yet. They have a lot of special talents, sure, but we three know something about special talents—that ought not to confuse us. But there is something else about them that is *different*."

The other two agreed with him but could offer no help. Sometime later Joan said that she was going to bed and left the room. The two men stayed for a last smoke.

Joan stuck her head back in the room. "I know what it is that is so different about these people," she announced. "They are so *alive*."

CHAPTER SIX

Ichabod!

PHILIP HUXLEY went to bed and to sleep as usual. From there on nothing was usual.

He became aware that he was inhabit-

ing another's body, thinking with another's mind. The Other was aware of Huxley, but did not share Huxley's thoughts.

The Other was at home, a home never experienced by Huxley, yet familiar. It was on Earth, incredibly beautiful, each tree and shrub fitting into the landscape as if placed there in the harmonic scheme of an artist. The house grew out of the ground.

The Other whose being Huxley shared left the house with his wife and prepared to leave for the capital of the planet. Huxley thought of the destination as a "capital," yet he knew that the idea of government imposed by force was foreign to the nature of these people. The "capital" was merely the accustomed meeting place of the group whose advice was followed in matters affecting the entire race.

The Other and his wife, accompanied by Huxley's awareness, stepped into the garden, shot straight up into the air, and speeded over the countryside, flying hand in hand.

The country was green, fertile, parklike, dotted with occasional buildings, but nowhere did Huxley see the jammed masses of a city.

They passed rapidly over a large body of water, perhaps as large as the modern Mediterranean, and landed in a clearing in a grove of olive trees.

THE Young Men demanded a sweeping change in custom, first, that the ancient knowledge should henceforth be the reward of ability rather than common birthright, and second, that the greater should rule the lesser. Loki urged their case, his arrogant face upthrust and crowned with bright red hair. He spoke in words, which disturbed Huxley's host, telepathic rapport being the natural method of mature discussion. But Loki had closed his mind to it.

Jove answered him, speaking for all:

"My son, your words seem vain and without serious meaning. You ask that the ancient knowledge be made the reward of ability. Has it not always been so? Does our cousin, the ape, fly through the air? Is not the infant soul bound by hunger, and sleep, and the ills of the flesh? Can the oriole level the mountain with his glance? The powers of our kind that set us apart from the younger spirits on this planet are now exercised by those who possess the ability, and none other. How can we make that so which is already so?

"You demand that the greater shall rule the lesser. Is it not now so? Has it not always been so? Are you ordered about by the babe at the breast? Does the waving of the grass cause the wind? What dominion do you desire other than over yourself? Do you wish to tell your brother when to sleep and when to eat? If so, to what purpose?"

Vulcan broke roughly in while the old man was still speaking. Huxley felt a stir of shocked repugnance go through the council at this open disregard of good manners.

"Enough of this playing with words. We know what we want; you know what we want. We are determined to take it, council or no. We are tired of this sham equality. We intend to put an end to it. We are the strong and the able; the natural leaders of mankind. The rest shall follow us and serve us, as is the natural order of things."

Jove's eyes rested thoughtfully on Vulcan's crooked leg. "You should let me help you heal that twisted limb, my son."

"No one can heal my limb!"

"No. No one but yourself. And until you heal the twist in your mind, you can not heal the twist in your limb."

"There is no twist in my mind!"

"Then heal your limb."

The Young Men stirred uneasily. They

could see that Vulcan was making a fool of himself, and wished to put a stop to it. Mercury separated himself from the group and came forward.

"Hear me, Father. We do not purpose warring with you. Rather it is our intention to add to your glory. Declare yourself king under the sun. Let us be your legates to extend your rule to every creature that walks, or crawls, or swims. Let us create for you the pageantry of dominion, the glory of conquest. Lead us, Father! Be our king!"

Slowly the elder man shook his head. "Not so. There is no knowledge, other than knowledge of oneself, and that should be free to every man who has the wit to learn. There is no power, other than the power to rule oneself, and that can be neither given, nor taken away. As for the poetry of empire, that has all been done before. There is no need to do it again. If such romance amuses you, enjoy it in the records—there is no need to bloody the planet again."

"That is the final word of the council, Father?"

"That is our final word." He stood up and gathered his robe about him, signifying that the session had ended. Mercury shrugged his shoulders and joined his fellows.

THERE was one more session of the council—the last—called to decide what to do about the ultimatum of the Young Men. Not every member of the council thought alike; they were as diverse as any group of human beings. They *were* human beings, not supermen. Some held out for opposing the Young Men with all the forces at their command, translate them to another dimension, wipe their minds clean, even crush them by major force.

All these courses were repugnant to them in the deepest inner sense, although physically quite possible. The simple bucolic appearance of their culture was superficial; they had such complete control over their bodies and the world around them that they had no need of the complex mechanical crutches used by modern man to maintain his precarious defenses against the jungle.

But to use force on the Young Men was contrary to their whole philosophy. "Free will is the primary fact of the Cosmos. Where there is no free will there can be no values, no evaluation. Shall we degrade, destroy all that we have worked for by subverting the will of even one man?"

Huxley became aware that these Elders had no need to remain on Earth for their own development. They were anxious to move on to another place, the nature of which escaped Huxley, save that it was not of the time and space he knew. In this place they anticipated further development, greater and more interesting problems.

The issue was this: Had they done what they could to help the incompletely developed balance of the race? Were they justified in abdicating?

The final decision was yes, but a female member of the council, whose name, it seemed to Huxley, was Demeter, argued that records should be left to assist those who survived the inevitable collapse. "It is true that each member of the race must make himself strong, must make himself wise. We cannot make them wise. Yet, after famine and war and hatred have stalked the earth, should there not be a message, telling them of their heritage?"

The council agreed, and Huxley's host, recorder for the council, was ordered to prepare records and to leave them for those who would come after. Jove added an injunction:

"Bind the force patterns so that they shall not dissipate while this planet endures. Place them where they will outlast any local convulsions of the crust, so

that some at least will carry down through time."

SO ENDED that dream. But Huxley did not wake. He started at once to dream another dream, not through the eyes of another, but rather as if he watched a stero-movie, every scene of which was familiar to him.

The first dream, for all its tragic content, had not affected him tragically; but throughout the second dream he was oppressed by a feeling of heartbreak and overpowering weariness.

After the abdication of the Elders, the Young Men established their rule by fire and sword, searing rays and esoteric forces, chicanery and deception. Convinced of their destiny to rule, they convinced themselves that the end justified the means.

The end was empire—Mu, mightiest of empires and mother of empires.

Huxley saw her in her prime and felt almost that the Young Men had been right. She was glorious! Her heart-choking magnificence filled his eyes with tears; he mourned for the glory, the beautiful breathtaking glory that was hers, and is no more.

Gargantuan silent liners in her skies, broad-beamed vessels at her wharves,

loaded with grain and hides and spices, procession of priest and acolyte and humble believer, pomp and pageantry of power—he saw her intricate patterns of beauty and mourned her passing.

But in her swelling power there was the germ of decay. Inevitably Atlantis, richest colony, grew to political maturity and was irked by subordinate status. Schism and apostasy, disaffection and treason, brought harsh retaliation—and new rebellion.

Rebellions rose, were crushed. At last one rose that was not crushed. In less than fifteen months two-thirds of the peoples of the globe were dead; the remainder were racked by disease and hunger, and left with germ plasm damaged by the forces they had loosed.

But priests still held the ancient knowledge.

Not priests secure in mind and proud of their trust, but priests hunted and fearful, who had seen their hierarchy totter. There were such priests on both sides, and they unchained forces compared with which the previous fighting had been gentle.

The forces disturbed the isostatic balance of the earth's crust.

Mu shuddered and sank some two thousand feet. Tidal wave met at her middle, broke back on itself, surged twice around the globe. It climbed the Chinese plains, lapped the feet of Alta Himalaya.

Atlantis shook and rumbled and split for three days before the water covered it. A few escaped by air, to land on ground still wet with the ooze of exposed seabottom, or on peaks high enough to fend off the tidal waves. There they had still to wring a living from the bare soil, with minds unused to primitive art—but some survived.

Of Mu there was not a trace. As for Atlantis, a few islands, mountaintops short days before, marked the spot. Waters rolled over the twin Towers of the Sun and fish swam through the gardens of the viceroy.

The woebegone feeling which had pursued Huxley now overwhelmed him. He seemed to hear a voice in his head:

"Woe! Cursed be Loki! Cursed be Venus! Cursed be Vulcan! Thrice cursed am I, their apostate servant, Orab, Archpriest of the Isles of the Blessed. Woe is me! Even as I curse I long for Mu, mighty and sinful. Twenty-one years ago, seeking a place to die, on this mountaintop I stumbled on this record of the mighty ones who were before us. Twenty-one years I have labored to make the record complete, searching the dim recesses of my mind for knowledge long unused, roaming the other planes for knowledge I never had. Now in the eight hundred and ninety-second year of my life, and of the destruction of Mu the three hundred and fifth, I, Orab, return to my fathers."

Huxley was very happy to wake up.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"The Fathers Have Eaten Sour Grapes, and the Children's Teeth Are Set on Edge"

BEN was in the living room when Phil came in to breakfast. Joan arrived almost on Phil's heels. There were shadows under her eyes and she looked unhappy. Ben spoke in a tone that was almost surly.

"What's troubling you, Joan? You look like the wrath to come."

"Please, Ben," she answered, in a tired voice, "don't heckle me. I've had bad dreams all night."

"That so? Sorry. But if you think you had bad dreams all night, you should have seen the cute little nightmares I've been riding."

Phil looked at the two of them.

"What did you dream about?"

Neither one answered him.

"Wait a minute. I had some very strange dreams myself." He pulled his notebook out of a pocket and tore out three sheets. "I want to find out something. Will you each write down what your dreams were about, before anyone says anything more? Here's a pencil, Joan."

They balked a little, but complied.

"Read them aloud, Joan."

She picked up Ben's slip and read, " 'I dreamed that your theory about the degeneracy of the human race was perfectly correct.' "

She put it down and picked up Phil's slip. " 'dreamed that I was present at the Twilight of the Gods, and that I saw the destruction of Mu and Atlantis.' "

There was dead silence as she took the last slip, her own.

"My dream was about how the people destroyed themselves by rebelling against Odin."

Ben was first to commit himself. "Anyone of those slips could have applied to my dreams." Joan nodded. Phil got up again, went out, and returned at once with his diary. He opened it and handed it to Joan, then said:

"Here's something I want you both to see. I wrote it earlier this morning. Kid, will you read that aloud, starting with 'June sixteenth'?"

She read it through slowly, without looking up from the pages. Phil waited until she had finished and closed the book before speaking. "Well," he said.

Ben crushed out a cigarette which had burned down to his fingers. "It's a remarkably accurate description of my dream, except that the elder you call Jove, I thought of as Ahuramazda."

"And I thought Loki was Lucifer."

"You're both right," agreed Phil. "I don't remember any spoken names for any of them. It just seemed that I knew what their names were."

"Me, too."

"Say," interjected Ben, "we are talking as if these dreams were real, as if we had all been to the same movie."

Phil turned on him. "Well, what do *you* think?"

"Oh, the same as you do, I guess. I'm stumped. Does anybody mind if I eat breakfast—or drink some coffee, at least?"

AMBROSE JAMES came in before they had a chance to talk it over after breakfast—by tacit consent they had held their tongues during a sketchy meal.

"I see," he said, searching their faces, "that none of you look very happy this morning. That is not surprising; no one does immediately after experiencing the records."

Ben pushed back his chair and leaned across the table at James. "Those dreams

were deliberately arranged for us?"

"Yes, indeed, but we were sure that you were ready to profit by them. But I have come to ask you to interview the Senior. If you can hold your questions for him, it will be simpler."

"The Senior?"

"You haven't met him as yet. It is the way we refer to the one we judge best fitted to co-ordinate our activities."

EPHRAIM HOWE had the hills of New England in his face, lean, gnarled cabinet-maker's hands. He was not young. There was courtly grace in his lanky figure. Everything about him, the twinkle in his pale blue eyes, the clasp of his hand, his drawl, bespoke integrity.

"Sit yourselves down," he said. "I'll come straight to the point." He called it 'pint'. "You've been exposed to a lot of curious things and you've a right to know why. You've seen the Ancient Records now, part of 'em. I'll tell you how this institution came about, what it's for, and why you are going to be asked to join us.

"Wait a minute," he added, holding up a hand. "Don't say anything just yet. . . ."

WHEN Fra Junipero Serra first laid eyes on Mount Shasta in 1781, the Indians told him that it was a holy place, only for medicine men. He assured them that he was a medicine man, serving a greater Master, and to keep face, dragged his sick, frail old body up to the snow line, where he slept before returning.

The dream he had there—of the Garden of Eden, the Sin, the Fall, and the Deluge—convinced him that it was indeed a holy place. He returned to San Francisco, planning to found a mission at Shasta. But there was too much for one old man to do, so many souls to save, so many mouths to feed. He surrendered his soul to rest two years later, but laid an injunction on a fellow monk to carry out his intention.

It is recorded that this friar left the northernmost mission in 1785 and did not return.

The Indians fed the holy man, who lived on the mountain until 1843, by which time he had gathered about him a group of neophytes, three Indians, a Russian, a Yankee mountainman. The Russian carried on after the death of the friar until joined by a Chinese, fled from his indenture. The Chinese made more progress in a few weeks than the Russian had in half a lifetime; the Russian gladly surrendered first place to him.

The Chinese was still there over a hundred years later, though long since retired from administration. He tutored in esthetics and humor.

"AND this establishment has just one purpose," continued Ephraim Howe. "We aim to see to it that Mu and Atlantis don't happen again. Everything that the Young Men stood for, we are against.

"We see the history of the world as a series of crises in a conflict between two opposing philosophies. Ours is based on the notion that life, consciousness, intelligence, ego is the important thing in the world. That puts us in conflict with every force that tends to destroy, deaden, degrade the human spirit, or to make it act contrary to its nature. We see another crisis approaching; we need recruits. You've been selected."

He paused for a moment. Coburn ventured to ask a question.

"Why," he said, "do you feel another crisis is imminent?"

Howe shifted his gangling form in his rocking chair.

"It's these monkey tricks," he said seriously. "Since the fall of Mu the race

has climbed back up quite a way, especially in mechanical development. We can build machines to do practically anything, talk and see around the world, fly through the air and even through space, make a million articles of trade at a time—monkey tricks, all of them, no more significant to the spirit than an ape's ability to use a club to knock nuts from a tree. But with television and radio one sick soul can infect a continent, a world. And there are things in the laboratories now that could knock man right off his perch, plunge him back into a darkness from which he might never climb out. Radiations, damaged germ plasm. As happened after Mu.

"This crisis has been growing on us since Napoleon. Europe has gone, and Asia, surrendered to authoritarianism, nonsense like the leader principle, totalitarianism, all the bonds placed on liberty which treat men as so many economic and political units with no importance as individuals. No dignity — do what you're told, believe what you are told, and shut your mouth! Workers, soldiers, breeding units. . . .

"If *that* were the object of life, there would have been no point in including consciousness in the scheme at all!"

"This continent," Howe went on, "has been a refuge of freedom, a place where the soul could grow. But the forces that killed enlightenment in the rest of the world are spreading here. Little by little they have whittled away at human liberty and human dignity. A repressive law, a bullying school board, a blind dogma to be accepted under pain of persecution—doctrines that will shackle mankind and put blinders on their eyes so that they will never regain their lost heritage.

"We need help to fight it."

Huxley stood up. "You can count on us."

Before Joan and Coburn could speak the Senior interposed. "Don't answer yet. Go back to your chambers and think about it. We'll talk again."

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Precept upon Precept. . ."

HAD the place on Mount Shasta been a university, some of the value of the instruction would have been lost, by having been broken up into disjointed courses. As it was, Huxley, Coburn, and Joan Freeman learned from tutors who led them to teach themselves, and they took to it as an eel seeks the sea, with a sense of returning home after a long absence.

All three made rapid progress from the first. Being possessed of rudimentary perception and some knowledge of telepathy, their instructors could teach them directly. First they learned to control their bodies. They regained the control over each function, each muscle, each tissue, each gland, that a man should possess, but has largely forgotten, save a few obscure students in the far east. There was a deep, welling delight in willing the body to obey and having it comply. They became intimately aware of their bodies, but their bodies no longer ruled them. Fatigue, hunger, cold, pain—these things no longer drove them, but rather were simply useful signals that a good engine needed attention.

Nor did the engine need as much attention as before; the body was driven by a mind that knew precisely both its capacity and its limitations. Furthermore, through understanding their bodies, they were enabled to increase those capacities to their full potential. A week of sustained activity, without rest or food, was as easy as a morning's work had been. As for mental labor, it did not cease at all, save when they willed it, despite sleep, digestive languor, ennui, external stimuli, or muscular activity.

THE greatest delight was levitation. To fly through the air, to hang suspended in the quiet heart of a cloud, to sleep, like Mohamet, floating between ceiling and floor—these were sensuous delights unexpected, and never before experienced, except in dreams, dimly.

Huxley found it difficult to learn to levitate. His inquiring mind demanded a reason why the will should apparently be able to set at naught the inexorable "law" of gravitation, and his doubt dissipated his volition. His tutor reasoned with him patiently.

"Are you powerless to move your hand because you can not give a full rational explanation of the mystery? Life has power to affect matter; you know that—you have experienced it directly. It is a fact. Now there is no 'why' about a fact. There it stands, serene, demonstrating itself. First you tell me *why* you *are*, then I will tell you why levitation is possible.

"Now come," he continued, "place yourself in rapport with me, and try to feel how I do it, as I levitate."

Phil tried again.

"I don't get it," he concluded miserably.

"Look down."

Phil did so, gasped, and fell three feet to the floor. That night he joined Ben and Joan in a flight over the High Sierras.

Their tutor enjoyed with quiet amusement the zest with which they entered into the sport. He knew that their pleasure was suited to their stage of development. They would soon learn its relative worth, and then be ready to turn their minds to serious work.

CHAPTER NINE

Fledglings Fly

"WE COULD hang around here for fifty years, learning new things, but in the meantime we wouldn't be getting anywhere. I, for one, am ready to go back as soon as possible.

Phil crushed out a cigarette and looked around at his two friends reflectively, awaiting their reaction.

Coburn pursed his lips and nodded. "I feel the same way, Phil. There is no limit to what we could learn here, of course, but there comes a time when you just have to use some of the things you learn, or it just boils up inside. I think we had better tell the Senior, and get about doing it right away."

Phil turned to the girl. "How about it, Joan?"

She nodded vigorously. "There's work to be done, and the place to do it is Western, not up here in Never-Never Land. Boy, I can hardly wait to see old Brinckley's face when we get through working out on him!"

Huxley sought out the mind of Ephraim Howe. The other two waited for him to confer, courteously refraining from attempting to enter the telepathic conversation. "He says he has been expecting to hear from us, and that he intends to make it a full conference. He'll meet us all here."

"Full conference? Everybody on the mountain?"

"Everybody—on the mountain, or not. I gather it's customary when new members decide what their future work will be."

"Whew!" exclaimed Joan. "That gives me stage fright just to think about it. Who's going to speak for us? It won't be little Joan."

"How about you, Ben?"

"If you wish."

"Take over."

They meshed into rapport. As long as they remained so, Ben's voice would express the combined thought of the trio. Ephraim Howe entered alone, but they were aware that he was in rapport with, and spokesman for, not only the adepts on the mountainside, but also the two hun-

dred odd full-geniuses scattered about the country.

The conference commenced with direct mind-to-mind exchange:

—"We feel that it is time we were at work. We have not learned all that there is to learn, it is true; nevertheless, we need to use our present knowledge."

—"That is well and entirely as it should be, Benjamin. You have learned all that we can teach you at this time. Now you must take what you have learned out into the world, and use it, in order that knowledge may mature into wisdom."

"Not only for that reason do we wish to leave, but for another more urgent. As you yourself taught us, the crisis approaches. We want to fight it."

"How do you propose to fight the forces bringing on the crisis?"

"Well. . . ." Ben did not use the word, but the delay in his thought produced the impression. "As we see it, in order to make men free, free so that they may develop as men and not as animals, it is necessary that we undo what the Young Men did. The Young Men refused to permit any but their own select few to share in the racial heritage of ancient knowledge. For men again to become free it is necessary to return to each man his ancient knowledge powers."

"THAT is true; what do you intend to do about it?"

"We will go out and tell about it. We all three are in the educational system; we can make ourselves heard—I, in the medical school at Western; Phil and Joan in the department of psychology. With the training you have given us, we can overturn the traditional ideas in short order. We can start a renaissance in education that will prepare the way for everyone to receive the wisdom that you, our elders, can offer them."

"Do you think that it will be as simple as that?"

"We don't expect it to be simple. We know that we will run head on into some of the most cherished misconceptions of everyone, but we can use that very fact to help. It will be spectacular; we can get publicity through it that will call attention to our work. You have taught us enough that we can prove that we are right. For example—suppose we put on a public demonstration of levitation, and proved before thousands of people that the human mind could do the things we know it can. Suppose we said that anyone could learn such things who first learned the techniques of telepathy. Why, in a year or two, the whole nation could be taught telepathy, and be ready for the reading of the records, and all that that implies!"

Howe's mind was silent for several long minutes. No message reached them. The three stirred uneasily under his thoughtful, sober gaze. Finally:

"If it were as simple as that, would we not have done it before?"

The thought that Coburn sent in answer was hesitant. "It is difficult. . . . Many of you are very old, and we know that all of you are wise. Nevertheless, it seems to us, in our youth, that you have waited over long in acting. We feel—we feel that you have allowed the pursuit of understanding to sap your will to action. From our standpoint, you have waited from year to year, perfecting an organization that will never be perfected, while the storm that overturns the world is gathering its force."

The conference of elders pondered before Ephraim Howe answered for it.

"Each must act as he sees it. Is it your decision to do this?"

When finally he answered, Ben spoke aloud, in a steady voice, "It is!"

"So let it be! Do you remember the history of Salem?"

"Salem? Where the witchcraft trials were held? Do you mean to warn us that we may be persecuted as witches?"

"No. There are no laws against witchcraft today, of course. It would be better if there were. We hold no monopoly on the power of knowledge; do not expect an easy victory. Beware of those who hold some portion of the ancient knowledge and use it to a base purpose—witches . . . black magicians!"

THE conference concluded and the rapport loosed; Ephraim Howe shook hands solemnly all around and bid them good-by.

"I envy you kids," he said, "going off like Jack the Giant Killer to tackle the whole educational system. You've got your work cut out for you. Do you remember what Mark Twain said? 'God made an idiot for practice; then he made a school board.' Still, I'd like to come along."

"Why don't you, sir?"

"Eh? No, 'twouldn't do. I don't really believe in your plan. F'r instance—it was frequently a temptation during the years I spent peddlin' hardware in the State o' Maine to show people better ways of doing things. But I didn't do it; people are used to paring knives and ice cream freezers, and they won't thank you to show them how to get along without them, just by the power of the mind. Not all at once, anyhow. They'd read you out of meetin'—and lynch you too, most probably.

"Still, I'll be keeping an eye on you all the time."

Joan reached up and kissed him good-by. They left.

CHAPTER TEN

Lion's Mouth

PHIL picked his largest class to make the demonstration which was to get the newspapers interested in them. They had played safe to the extent of getting back to Los Angeles and started with the fall semester before giving anyone cause to suspect that they possessed powers out of the ordinary.

Phil built up to his key demonstration with care. His lectures were sufficiently innocuous that he could afford to have his department head drop in at any time without fear of reprimand or interference. But the combined effect was to prepare the students emotionally for what was to come. Carefully selected assignments for collateral reading heightened his chances.

"Hypnosis is a subject but vaguely understood, even today," he began his lecture on the selected day. "It formerly classed with witchcraft, magic, and so forth, as a silly superstition. But it is a commonplace thing today, and easily demonstrated. Consequently the most conservative psychologists must recognize its existence and try to observe its characteristics." He went on and on, cheerfully uttering bromides and commonplaces, while he sized up the emotional attitude of the class.

When he felt that they were ready to accept the ordinary phenomena of hypnosis without surprise, he called Joan, who had attended for the purpose, up to the front of the room. She went easily into a state of light hypnosis. They ran quickly through the small change of hypnotic phenomena—catalepsy, compulsion, post-hypnotic suggestion—while he kept up a running chatter about the relation between the minds of the operator and the subject, the possibility of direct telepathic control, the Rhine experiments, and similar matters, orthodox in themselves, but close to the borderline of heterodox thought.

Then he offered to attempt to reach the mind of the subject telepathically.

Each student was invited to write something on a slip of paper. A volunteer floor committee collected the slips, and handed them to Huxley one at a time. He solemnly went through the hocus-pocus of glancing at each one, while Joan read them

off as his eyes rested lightly on them.

By such easy stages he led them around to the idea that mind and will could exercise control over the body much more complete than that ordinarily encountered. He passed lightly over the tales of Hindu holy men who could lift themselves up into the air and even travel from place to place.

"We have an exceptional opportunity to put such tales to practical test," he told them. "The subject believes fully any statement made by the operator. I shall tell Miss Freeman that she is to exert her will power, and rise up off the floor. It is certain that she will believe that she can do it. She will be in an optimum condition to carry out the order, if it can be done. Miss Freeman!"

"Yes, Mr. Huxley."

"Exert your will. Rise up in the air!"

Joan rose straight up into the air, some six feet, until her head nearly touched the high ceiling.

—"How 'm I doin', pal?"—"Swell, kid, you're wowin' 'em. Look at 'em stare!"

At that moment Brinckley burst into the room, rage in his eyes.

"MR. HUXLEY, you have broken your word to me, and disgraced this university!" It was some ten minutes after the fiasco ending to the demonstration. Huxley faced the president in Brinckley's private office.

"I made you no promise. I have not disgraced the school," Phil answered with equal pugnacity.

"You have indulged in cheap tricks of fake magic to bring your department into disrepute."

"So I'm a faker, am I? You stiff-necked old fossil—explain this one!" Huxley levitated himself until he floated three feet above the rug.

"Explain what?" To Huxley's amazement Brinckley seemed unaware that anything unusual was going on. He continued to stare at the point where Phil's head had been. His manner showed nothing but a slight puzzlement and annoyance at Huxley's apparently irrelevant remark.

Was it possible that the doddering old fool was so completely self-deluded that he could not observe anything that ran counter to his own preconceptions, even when it happened directly under his eyes? Phil reached out with his mind and attempted to see what went on inside Brinckley's head. He got one of the major surprises of his life. He expected to find the floundering mental processes of near senility; he found. . . . cold calculation, keen ability, set in a matrix of pure evil that sickened him.

It was just a glimpse; then he was cast out with a wrench that numbed his brain. Brinckley had discovered his spying and thrown up his defences—the hard defences of a disciplined mind.

Phil dropped back to the floor, and left the room without a word or a backward glance.

From THE WESTERN STUDENT, October 3rd:

PSYCH PROF FIRED FOR FRAUD

. . . . . students' accounts varied, but all agreed that it had been a fine show. Fullback 'Buzz' Arnold told your reporter, "I hated to see it happen; Prof Huxley is a nice guy and he certainly put on a clever skit with some good dead-pan acting. I could see how it was done, of course—it was the same the Great Arturo used in his turn at the Orpheum last spring. But I can see Doctor Brinckley's viewpoint; you can't permit monkey shines at a serious center of learning."

President Brinckley gave the STUDENT the following official statement: "It is with real regret that I announce the termination of Mr. Huxley's association with this institution—for the good of the University. Mr. Huxley had been repeatedly warned as to where his steps were leading him. He is a young man of considerable ability. Let us devoutly hope that this experience will serve as a lesson to him in whatever line of endeavor . . . . . "

COBURN handed the paper back to Huxley.

"You know what happened to me?" he inquired.

"Something new?"

"Invited to resign . . . No publicity—just a gentle hint. My patients got well too fast; I'd quit using surgery, you know."

"How perfectly stinking!" This from Joan.

"Well," Ben considered, "I don't blame the medical director; Brinckley forced his hand. I guess we underrated the old cuss."

"Rather! Ben, he's every bit as capable as any one of us, and as for his motives—I gag when I think about it."

"And I thought he was just a mouse," grieved Joan. "We should have pushed him into the tar pits last spring. I told you to. What do we do now?"

"Go right ahead." Phil's reply was grim. "We'll turn the situation to our own advantage. We've gotten some publicity—we'll use it."

"What's the gag?"

"Levitation again. It's the most spectacular thing we've got for a crowd. Call in the papers, and tell 'em that we will publicly demonstrate levitation at noon tomorrow in Pershing Square."

"Won't the papers fight shy of sticking their necks out on anything that sounds as fishy as that?"

"Probably they would, but here's how we'll handle that: Make the whole thing just a little screwball and give 'em plenty of funny angles to write up. Then they can treat it as a feature rather than as straight news. We'll get more column-inches than Russia. The lid's off, Joan—you can do anything you like; the screwier the better. Let's get going, troops. I'll call the News Service. Ben, you and Joan split up the dailies between you."

The reporters were interested, certainly. They were captivated by Joan's obvious good looks, cynically amused by Phil's flowing tie and bombastic claims, and seriously impressed by his taste in whiskey. They began to take notice when Coburn courteously poured drinks for them without bothering to touch the bottle.

But when Joan floated around the room while Phil rode a non-existent bicycle across the ceiling, they balked.

"Honest, doc," as one of them put it, "we've got to eat. You don't expect us to go back and tell a city editor anything like this. Come clean—is it the whiskey, or just plain hypnotism?"

"Put it any way you like, gentlemen. Just be sure that you say that we will do it all over again in Pershing Square at noon tomorrow."

Phil's diatribe against Brinckley came as an anticlimax to the demonstration, but the reporters obligingly noted it.

JOAN got ready for bed that night with a feeling of vague depression. The exhilaration of entertaining the newspaper boys had worn off. Ben had proposed supper and a bit of dancing to mark their last night of private life, but it had not been a success. To start with, they had blown a tire while coming down a steep curve on Beachwood Drive, and Phil's grey sedan had rolled over and over. They would all have been seriously injured had it not been for the automatic body control which they possessed.

When Phil examined the wreck, he expressed puzzlement as to its cause. "Those tires were perfectly all right," he maintained. "I had examined them all the way through this morning." But he insisted on continuing with their evening of relaxation.

The floor show seemed dull, and the jokes crude and callous, after the light, sensitive humor they had learned to enjoy through association with Master Ling. The ponies in the chorus were young and beautiful—Joan had enjoyed watching

them, but she made the mistake of reaching out to touch their minds. The incongruity of the vapid, insensitive spirits she found in almost every instance added to her malaise.

She was relieved when the floor show ended and Ben asked her to dance. Both of the men were good dancers, especially Coburn, and she fitted herself into his arms contentedly. Her pleasure didn't last; a drunken couple bumped into them repeatedly. The man was quarrelsome, the woman shrilly vitriolic. Joan asked her escorts to take her home.

These things bothered her as she prepared for bed. Joan, who had never known acute physical fear in her life, feared just one thing—the corrosive, dirty emotions of the poor in spirit. Malice, envy, spite, the insults of twisted, petty minds; these things could hurt her, just by being in her presence, even if she were not the direct object of attack. She was not yet sufficiently mature to have acquired a smooth armor of indifference to the opinion of the unworthy.

After a summer in the company of men of good will, the incident with the drunken couple dismayed her. She felt dirtied by the contact. Worse still, she felt an outlander, a stranger in a strange land.

She awakened sometime in the night

with the sense of loneliness increased to overwhelming proportions. She was acutely aware of the two million-odd living beings around her, but the whole city seemed alive only with malignant entities, jealous of her, anxious to drag her down to their own ignoble status. This attack on her spirit, this attempt to despoil the sanctity of her inner being, assumed an almost corporate nature. It seemed to her that it was nibbling at the edges of her mind, snuffling at her defences.

Terrified, she called out to Ben and Phil. There was no answer; her mind could not find them.

The filthy thing that threatened her was aware of her failure; she could feel it leer. In open panic she called to the Senior.

No answer. This time the thing spoke, —"That way, too, is closed."

As hysteria claimed her, as her last defences crumbled, she was caught in the arms of a stronger spirit, whose calm, untroubled goodness encysted her against the evil thing that stalked her.

"Ling!" she cried, "Master Ling!" before racking sobs claimed her.

She felt the quiet, reassuring humor of his smile while the fingers of his mind reached out and smoothed away the tension of her fear. Presently she slept.

He stayed with her all through the night, and talked with her, until she awakened.

BEN AND PHIL listened to her account of the previous night with worried faces.

"That settles it," Phil decided. "We've been too careless. From now on until this thing is finished, we stay in rapport day and night, awake and asleep. As a matter of fact, I had a bad time of it myself last night, though nothing to equal what happened to Joan."

"So did I, Phil. What happened to you?"

"Nothing very much—just a long series of nightmares in which I kept losing confidence in my ability to do any of the things we learned on Shasta. What about you?"

"Same sort of thing, with variations. I operated all night long, and all of my patients died on the table. Not very pleasant—but something else happened that wasn't a dream. You know I still use an old-fashioned straight-edge razor; I was shaving away, paying no attention to it, when it jumped in my hand and cut a big gash in my throat. See? It's not entirely healed yet." He indicated a thin red line which ran diagonally down the right side of his neck.

"Why, Ben!" squealed Joan. "You might have been killed."

"That's what I thought," he agreed dryly.

"You know, kids," Phil said, slowly, "these things aren't accidental—"

"Open up in there!" The order was bawled from the other side of the door. As one mind, their senses of direct perception jumped through solid oak and examined the speaker. Plainclothes did not conceal the profession of the over-size individual waiting there, even had they not been able to see the gold shield on his vest. A somewhat smaller, but equally officious man waited with him.

Ben opened the door and enquired gently, "What do you want?"

The larger man attempted to come in. Coburn did not move.

"I asked you your business."

"Smart guy, eh? I'm from police headquarters. You Huxley?"

"No."

"Coburn?" Ben nodded.

"You'll do. That Huxley behind you? Don't either of you ever stay home? Been here all night?"

"No," said Coburn, frostily. "Not that it is any of your business."

"I'll decide about that. I want to talk to you two. I'm from the bunco squad.

What's this game you were giving the boys yesterday?"

"No game, as you call it. Come down to Pershing Square at noon today and see for yourself."

"You won't be doing anything in Pershing Square today, Bud."

"Why not?"

"Park Commission's orders."

"What authority?"

"Huh?"

"By what act, or ordinance, do they deny the right of a private citizen to make peaceful use of a public place? Who is that with you?"

The smaller man identified himself. "Name's Ferguson, D. A.'s office. I want your pal Huxley on a criminal libel complaint. I want you too as a witness."

Ben's stare became colder, if possible. "Do either of you," he inquired, in gently snubbing tones, "have a warrant?"

They looked at each other, and failed to reply.

"Then it is hardly profitable to continue this conversation, is it?" Ben suggested and closed the door in their faces.

He turned around to his companions and grinned. "Well, they are closing in. Let's see what the papers gave us."

They found just one story. It said nothing about their proposed demonstration, but related that Doctor Brinckley had lodged a complaint charging Phil with criminal libel. "That's the first time I ever heard of four metropolitan papers refusing a juicy news story," was Ben's comment. "What are you going to do about Brinckley's charge?"

"Nothing," Phil. told him, "except possibly libel him again. If he goes through with it, it will be a beautiful opportunity to prove our claims in court. Which reminds me—we don't want our plans interfered with today; those bird dogs may be back with warrants most any time. Where'll we hide out?"

On Ben's suggestion they spent the morning buried in the downtown public library.

At five minutes to twelve they flagged a cab and rode to Pershing Square.

They stepped out of the cab into the arms of six sturdy policemen.

"BEN, PHIL, how much longer do I have to put up with this?"

—"Steady, kid. Don't get upset."

—"I'm not, but why should we stay pinched when we can duck out any time?"

—"That's the point; we can escape any time. We've never been arrested before; let's see what it's like."

THEY were gathered that night late around the fireplace in Joan's house. Escape had, in fact, presented no difficulties, but they had waited until an hour when the jail was quiet to prove that stone walls can not hold a person adept in the powers of the mind.

Ben was speaking. "I'd say we had enough data to draw a curve now."

"Which is?"

"You state it."

"All right. We came down from Shasta thinking that all we had to overcome was stupidity, ignorance, and a normal amount of human contrariness and cussedness. Now we know better. Any attempt to place the essentials of the ancient knowledge in the hands of the common people is met by determined, organized effort to prevent it, and to destroy, or disable the one who tries it."

"It's worse than that," amended Ben. "I spent our rest in the clink looking over the city. I wondered why the district attorney should take such an interest in us, so I took a look into his mind. I found out who his boss was, and took a look at *his* mind. What I found there interested me so much that I had to run up to the state capitol and see what made things tick there. That took me back to Spring Street

and the financial district. Believe it or not, from there I had to look up some of the most sacred cows in the community—clergymen, clubwomen, business leaders, and stuff." He paused.

"Well, what about it? Don't tell me everybody is out of step but Willie—I'll break down and cry."

"No, that was the odd part about it. Nearly everyone of these heavyweights were good Joes, people you'd like to know. But usually—not always, but usually—the good Joes were dominated by some one they trusted, some one who had helped them to get where they were, and these dominants were not good Joes, to state it gently. I couldn't get into all of their minds, but where I was able to get in I found the same sort of thing that Phil found in Brinckley—cold, calculated awareness that their power lay in keeping the people in ignorance."

Joan shivered. "That's a sweet picture you paint, Ben. What's our next move?"

"What do you suggest?"

"Me? I haven't reached any conclusion. Maybe we should take on these tough babies one at a time, and smear 'em."

"How about you, Phil?"

"I haven't anything better to offer. We'll have to plan a shrewd campaign, however."

"Well, I do have something to suggest myself."

"Let's have it."

"Admit that we blindly took on more than we could handle. Go back to Shasta and ask for help."

"Why, Ben!" Joan's exclamation of dismay was matched by Phil's unhappy face. Ben went on stubbornly:

"Sure! Sure! I know it's grovelling to tuck our tails between our legs and run for help after we told the elders how we were going to clean up the world this week and take Saturday off. But pride is too expensive and the job is too important. If there is any chance of doing what needs to be done, we need all the help that we can get. Let's not be infantile about it."

He broke off when he noticed Joan's expression. "What is it, kid?"

"We'll have to make some sort of a decision quickly—that is a police patrol car that just stopped out in front."

Ben turned back to Phil. "What'll it be; stay and fight, or go back for re-inforcements?"

"Oh, you're right. I've known it ever since I got a look at Brinckley's mind, but I hated to admit it."

The three stepped out into the patio, joined hands, and shot straight up into the air.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them."

"WELCOME home!" Ephraim Howe met them when they landed. "Glad to have you back." He led them into his own private apartment. "Rest yourselves while I stir up the fire a mite." He chucked a wedge of pinewood into the wide grate, pulled his homely old rocking chair around so that it faced both the fire and his guests, and settled down. "Now suppose you tell me all about it. No, I'm not hooked in with the others. You can make a full report to the council when you're ready."

"As a matter of fact, don't you already know everything that happened to us, Mr. Howe?" Phil looked directly at the Senior as he spoke.

"No, I truly don't. We let you go at it your own way, with Ling keeping an eye out to see that you didn't get hurt. He has made no report to me."

"Very well, sir." They took turns telling him all that had happened to them, occasionally letting him see directly through their minds the events they had taken part in.

When they were through, Howe gave them his quizzical smile and inquired, "So you've come around to the viewpoint of the council?"

"No, sir!" It was Phil who answered him. "We are more convinced of the need for positive, immediate action than we were when we left—but we are convinced, too, that we aren't strong enough nor wise enough to handle it alone. We've come back to ask for help, and to urge the council to abandon its policy of only teaching those who show that they are ready, and, instead to reach out and teach as many minds as can accept your teachings.

"You see, sir, our antagonists don't wait. They are active all the time. They've won in Europe; they are in the ascendency in Asia; they may win here in America, while we wait for an opportunity."

"Have you any method to suggest for tackling the problem?"

"No, that's why we came back. When we tried to teach others what we knew, we were stopped."

"That's the rub," Howe agreed. "Even though I didn't think your plan would work, I've been pretty much of your opinion for a good many years, but it's a hard nut to crack. What we have to give can't be printed in a book, nor broadcast over the air. It must be passed directly from mind to mind, wherever we find a mind ready to receive it."

They finished the discussions without finding a solution. Howe told them not to worry.

"Go along," he said, "and spend a few weeks in meditation and rapport. When you get an idea that looks as if it might work, bring it in and we'll call the council together to consider it."

"But, Senior," Joan protested for the trio, "you see—well, we had hoped to have the advice of the council in working out a plan. We don't know where to start, else we wouldn't have come back."

He shook his head. "The council can't help us now. You are the newest of the brethren, the youngest, and the least experienced. Those are your virtues, not your disabilities. You are as able as any of them, with as many lives behind you as the majority. The very fact that you have not spent years of this life in thinking in terms of eons and races gives you an advantage. Too broad a viewpoint, too philosophical an outlook paralyzes the will. This is a practical problem here and now; I want someone who can think of it in those terms, instead of speculating as to the results a thousand or ten thousand years from now, and planning to do something then."

THE three did as he asked. For weeks they discussed the situation, considered it in rapport as a single mind, exchanged thoughts severally, hammered at it in spoken conversation, meditated its ramifications. They roamed the nation with their minds, examining the human spirits that lay behind political and social action. With the aid of the archives on Shasta they relived dead years of the republic and learned how the present social and spiritual structure had come about. They learned the techniques by which the brotherhood of adepts had interceded in the past when freedom of thought and action in America had been threatened. They proposed and rejected dozens of schemes to get over the innate barriers to the dissemination of the esoteric arts of human consciousness.

Phil proposed a national department of education.

"We should go into politics," he told the other two, "as we did in the past. Education is the problem, and freedom of education is the method. If we had a Secretary of Education, appointed from among the elders, he could found a national academy in which freedom of thought would really prevail, and it could be the source from which the ancient

knowledge could filter out to the masses."

Ben was still considering this when Joan put in an objection.

"Suppose you lose the election?"

"Huh?"

"How do you know that we are strong enough at this time to do what would be necessary to win a national election? Even with all the special powers that the adepts have, it would be quite a chore to line up delegates for a national convention, get our candidate nominated, then get him elected in the face of all the political machines that would require handling, economic issues to be dealt with, pressure groups, newspapers, favorite sons, et cetera.

"And remember this—the opposition can fight as dirty as it pleases, but we have to fight fair, or we defeat our own aims when we win. If we go into politics, we have to win on issues while the opposition is free to use any spellbinding, or chicanery, they care to employ."

Ben nodded. "I am afraid she is right, Phil. Not but what a department of education is a good idea, under a decent administration. I can see where it would be just another chain on liberty under a bad administration. But you are absolutely right in one thing; this is a problem of education." He stopped to meditate, his mind turned inward.

Presently he resumed. "I wonder if we have been tackling this job from the right end? We've been thinking of it as a problem in education, yes, but we've been thinking of re-educating a hundred million adults, already set in their ways. How about the children? They haven't crystallized; wouldn't they be easier to teach?"

Joan sat up, her eyes bright. "Ben, you've got it! Back the children to beat the Young Men—a long shot to win!"

Phil shook his head doggedly. "No. I hate to throw cold water on your enthusiasm, but there is no way to go about it. Children are constantly in the care of adults; we couldn't get to them. Don't think for a moment that you could get past local school boards; they are the most conservative and tight little oligarchies in the whole political system."

They were sitting in a group of pine trees on the lower slopes of Mount Shasta. A little group of human figures came into view below them and climbed steadily toward the spot where the three rested. The discussion was suspended until the group moved beyond earshot. The trio watched them with casual, friendly interest.

They were all boys, ten to fifteen years old, except the leader, who bore his sixteen years with the serious dignity befitting one who is responsible for the safety and well-being of younger charges. They were dressed in khaki coats and breeches, campaign hats, neckerchiefs embroidered with a conifer and the insignia *Alpine Patrol, Troop I.* Each carried a staff, and a knapsack, and they were linked together with a stout line like adult mountain climbers.

As the little procession came abreast of the adults, the patrol leader gave them a wave in greeting, the merit badges on his sleeves flashing in the sun from cuff to shoulder. The three waved back and watched them trudge out of sight up the slope.

Phil watched them disappear with a far-away look. "Those were the good old days," he said. "I almost envy them."

"Were you one?" Ben said, his eyes still on the boys. "I remember how proud I was the day I got my merit badge in first aid."

"Born to be a doctor, eh, Ben?" commented Joan, her eyes maternal, approving. "I didn't—Say!"

"What's up?"

"Phil! That's your answer! That's how to reach the children in spite of parents and school boards."

She snapped into telepathic contact,

her ideas spilling excitedly into their minds. They went into rapport and ironed out the details. After a time Ben nodded and spoke aloud.

"It might work," he said. "Let's go back and talk it over with Ephraim."

"SENATOR MOULTON, these are the young people I was telling you about." Almost in awe, Joan looked at the face of the little, white-haired old man whose name had become a synonym for integrity. She felt the same impulse to fold her hands across her middle and bow which Master Ling inspired. She noted that Ben and Phil were having trouble not to seem gawky and coltish.

Ephraim Howe continued, "I have gone into their scheme and I think it is practical. If you do too, the council will go ahead with it. But it largely depends on you."

The Senator took them to himself with a smile, the smile that had softened the hearts of two generations of hard politicians.

"Tell me about it," he invited.

They did so—how they had tried and failed at Western University, how they had cudgeled their brains for a way, how a party of boys on a hike up the mountain had given them an inspiration. "You see, Senator, if we could just get enough boys up here all at once, boys too young to have been corrupted by their environment, and already trained, as these boys are, in the ideals of the ancients—human dignity, helpfulness, self-reliance, kindness, all those things set forth in their code—if we could get even five thousand such boys up here all at once, we could train them in telepathy, and how to impart telepathy to others.

"Once they were taught, and sent back to their homes, each one would be a center for spreading the knowledge. The antagonists could never stop it; it would be too widespread, epidemic. In a few years every child in the country would be telepathic, and they would even teach their elders—those that haven't grown too calloused to learn.

"And once a human being is telepathic, we can lead him along the path of the ancient wisdom!"

Moulton was nodding, and talking to himself. "Yes. Yes indeed. It could be done. Fortunately Shasta is a national park. Let me see, who is on that committee? It would take a joint resolution and a small appropriation. Ephraim, old friend, I am afraid I shall have to practice a little log-rolling to accomplish this. Will you forgive me?"

Howe grinned broadly.

"Oh, I mean it," Moulton continued. "People are so cynical, so harsh, about political expediency—even some of our brothers. Let me see, this will take about two years, I think, before the first camp can be held—"

"As long as that?" Joan was disappointed.

"Oh, yes, my dear. There are two bills to get before Congress, and much arranging to do to get them passed in the face of a full legislative calendar. There are arrangements to be made with the railroads and bus companies to give the boys special rates so that they can afford to come. We must start a publicity campaign to make the idea popular. Then there must be time for as many of our brothers as possible to get into the administration of the movement in order that the camp executives may be liberally interspersed with adepts. Fortunately I am a national trustee of the organization. Yes, I can manage it in two years time, I believe."

"Good heavens!" protested Phil. "Why wouldn't it be more to the point to teleport them here, teach them, and teleport them back?"

"You do not know what you are saying,

my son. Can we abolish force by using it? Every step must be voluntary, accomplished by reason and persuasion. Each human being must free himself; freedom cannot be thrust on him. Besides, is two years long to wait to accomplish a job that has been waiting since the deluge?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Do not be. Your youthful impatience has made it possible to do the job at all."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Ye Shall Know the Truth—"

ON THE lower slopes of Mount Shasta, down near McCloud, the camp grew up. When the last snow of the second spring was still hiding in the deeper gullies and on the north sides of ridges, U.S. Army Quartermaster trucks came lumbering over a road built the previous fall by army engineers. Pyramid tents were broken out and were staked down in rows on the bosom of a gently rolling alp. Cook shacks, an infirmary, a headquarters building took shape under the hammers and saws of the C.C.C. Camp Mark Twain was changing from blueprint to actuality.

Senator Moulton, strangely youthful breeches, leggings, khaki shirt, and a hat marked *Camp Director,* puttered around the field, encouraging, making decisions for the straw bosses, and searching, ever searching the minds of all who came into or near the camp for any purpose. Did anyone suspect? Had anyone slipped in who might be associated with partial adepts who opposed the real purpose of the camp?

Too late to let anything slip now—too late, and too much at stake.

In the middle West, in the deep South, in New York City and New England, in the mountains and on the coast, boys were packing suitcases, buying special Shasta Camp round-trip tickets, talking about it with all their envious contemporaries.

And all over the country the antagonists of human liberty—the racketeers, the crooked political figures, the shysters, the dealers in phony religions, the sweat shoppers, the petty authoritarians, all of the key figures among the traffickers in human misery and human oppression, themselves somewhat adept in the arts of the mind, and acutely aware of the danger of free knowledge—all of this unholy breed stirred uneasily and wondered what was taking place. Moulton had never been associated with anything but ill for them; Mount Shasta was one place they had never been able to touch. They hated the very name of the place. They recalled old stories and shivered.

They shivered, but they acted.

Special transcontinental buses loaded with the chosen boys. Could the driver be corrupted? Could his mind be taken over? Could tires or engine be tampered with? Could a switch be thrown? Could the drinking water be polluted?

Other eyes watched. A trainload of boys moved westward; in it, or flying over it, his direct perception blanketing the surrounding territory, and checking the motives of every mind within miles of his charges, was stationed at least one adept whose single duty it was to see that those boys reached Shasta safely.

Probably some of the boys would never have reached there had not the opponents of human freedom been caught off balance, doubtful, unorganized. For vice has this defect: It cannot be truly intelligent. Its very motives are its weakness. The attempts made to prevent the boys reaching Shasta were scattered and abortive. The adepts had taken the offensive for once, and their moves were faster and more rationally conceived than their antagonists.

Once in camp a tight screen surrounded the whole of Mount Shasta National Park. The Senior detailed adepts to point patrol night and day to watch with every

sense at their command for mean or malignant spirits. The camp itself was purged. Two of the counselors, and some twenty of the boys, were sent home when examination showed them to be damaged souls. The boys were not informed of their deformity, but plausible excuses were found for the necessary action.

THE camp resembled superficially a thousand other such camps. The courses in woodcraft were the same. The courts of honor met as usual to examine candidates. There were the usual sings around the campfire in the evening, the same setting-up exercises before breakfast. The slightly greater emphasis on the oath and the law of the organization was not noticeable.

Each one of the boys made at least one overnight hike in the course of the camp. In groups of fifteen or twenty they would set out in the morning in company of a counselor. That each counselor supervising such hikes was an adept was not evident, but it so happened. Each boy carried his blanket roll, and knapsack of rations, his canteen, knife, compass, and hand axe.

Phil started out with such a group one morning during the first week of the camp. He worked around the mountain to the east in order to keep well away from the usual tourist haunts. They camped that night on the bank of a mountain stream, fed by the glaciers, whose rush sounded in their ears as they ate supper.

After supper they sat around the campfire. Phil told them stories of the holy men of the east and their reputed powers, and of Saint Francis and the birds. He was in the middle of one of his yarns when a figure appeared within the circle of firelight.

Or rather figures. They saw an old man, in clothes that Davy Crockett might have worn, flanked by two beasts, on his left side a mountain lion, who purred when he saw the fire, on his right a buck of three points, whose soft brown eyes stared calmly into theirs.

Some of the boys were alarmed at first, but Phil told them quietly to widen their circle and make room for the strangers. They sat in decent silence for a while, the boys getting used to the presence of the animals. In time one of the boys timidly stroked the big cat, who responded by rolling over and presenting his soft belly. The boy looked up at the old man and asked,

"What is his name, Mister—"

"Ephraim. His name is Freedom."

"My, but he's tame! How do you get him to be so tame?"

"He reads my thoughts and trusts me. Most things are friendly when they know you—and most people."

The boy puzzled for a moment. "How can he read your thoughts?"

"It's simple. You can read his, too. Would you like to learn how?"

"Jiminy!"

"Just look into my eyes for a moment. There! Now look into his."

"Why—Why—I really believe I can!"

—"Of course you can. And mine too. I'm not talking out loud. Had you noticed."

—"Why, so you're not. I'm reading your thoughts!"

—"And I'm reading yours. Easy, isn't it?"

With Phil's help Howe had them all conversing by thought transference inside an hour. Then, to calm them down, he told them stories for another hour, stories that constituted an important part of their curriculum. He helped Phil get them to sleep, then left, the animals following after him.

The next morning Phil was confronted at once by a young skeptic. "Say, did I dream all that about an old man and a puma and a deer?"

—"Did you? Talk to my mind now."

—"You're doing it now!"

—"Certainly I am. And so are you. Now go tell the other boys the same thing."

Before they got back to camp, he advised them not to speak about it to any of the boys who had not as yet had their overnight hike, but that they test their new powers by trying it on any boy who had had his first all-night hike.

ALL was well until one of the boys had to return home in answer to a message that his father was ill. The elders would not wipe his mind clean of his new knowledge; instead they kept careful track of him. In time he talked, and the word reached the antagonists almost at once. Howe ordered the precautions of the telepathic patrol redoubled.

The patrol was able to keep out malicious persons, but it was not numerous enough to keep everything out. Forest fires broke out on the windward side of the camp late one night. No human being had been close to the spot; telekinetics was the evident method.

But what control over matter from a distance can do, it can also undo. Moulton squeezed the flame out with his will, refused it permission to burn, bade its vibrations to stop.

FOR the time being the enemy appeared to cease attempts to do the boys physical harm. But the enemy had not given up. Phil received a frantic call from one of the younger boys to come at once to the tent the boy lived in; his patrol leader was very sick. Phil found the lad in a state of hysteria, and being restrained from doing himself an injury by the other boys in the tent. He had tried to cut his throat with his jack knife and had gone berserk.

Phil took in the situation quickly and put in a call to Ben.

—"Ben! Come at once. I need your help."

Ben did so, zipping through the air and flying in through the door of the tent almost before Phil had time to lay the boy on his cot and start forcing him into a trance. The lad's startled tentmates did not have time to decide that Dr. Ben had been flying before he was standing in a normal fashion alongside their counselor.

Ben greeted him with tight communication, shutting the boys out of the circuit. —"What's up?"

—"They've gotten to him . . . and damn near wrecked him."

"—How?"

—"Preyed on his mind. Tried to make him suicide. But I traced back the hookup. Who do you think tried to do him in?—Brinckley!"

—"No!"

—"Definitely. You take over here; I'm going after Brinckley. Tell the Senior to have a watch put on all of the boys who have been trained to be sensitive to telepathy. I'm afraid that any of them may be gotten at before we can teach them how to defend themselves." With that he was gone, leaving the boys half convinced of levitation.

HE HAD not gone very far, was still gathering speed, when he heard a welcome voice in his head,

—"Phil! Phil! Wait for me."

He slowed down for a few seconds. A smaller figure flashed alongside his and grasped his hand. "It's a good thing I stay hooked in with you two. You'd have gone off to tackle that dirty old so-and-so without me."

He tried to maintain his dignity. "If I had thought that you should be along on this job, I'd have called you, Joan."

"Nonsense! And also fiddlesticks! You might get hurt, tackling him all alone. Besides, I'm going to push him into the tar pits."

They were south of the Tehachapi by now and rapidly approaching Los Angeles. They flitted over the Sierra Madre range, shot across San Fernando Valley, clipped the top of Mount Hollywood, and landed on the lawn of the president's residence at Western University. Brinckley saw, or felt, them coming and tried to run for it, but Phil grappled with him.

He shot one thought to Joan. —"You stay out of this, kid, unless I yell for help."

Brinckley did not give up easily. His mind reached out and tried to engulf Phil's. Huxley felt himself slipping, giving way before the evil onslaught. It seemed as though he were being dragged down, drowned, in horrible quicksand.

But he steadied himself and fought back.

WHEN Phil had finished that which was immediately necessary with Brinckley, he stood up and wiped his hands, as if to cleanse himself of the spiritual slime he had embraced.

"Let's get going," he said to Joan. "We're pushed for time."

"What did you do to him, Phil?" She stared with fascinated disgust at the thing on the ground.

"Little enough. I placed him in stasis. I've got to save him for use—for a time.

Up you go, girl. Out of here—before we're noticed."

Up they shot, with Brinckley's body swept along behind by tight telekinetic bond. They stopped above the clouds. Brinckley floated beside them, starfished, eyes popping, mouth loose, his smooth pink face expressionless. —"Ben!" Huxley was sending, "Ephraim Howe! Ambrose! To me! To me! Hurry!"

—"Coming, Phil!" came Coburn's answer.

—"I hear." The strong, calm thought held the quality of the Senior. "What is it, son? Tell me."

—"Not time!" snapped Phil. "Yourself, Senior, and all others that can. Rendezvous! Hurry!"

"We come." The thought was still calm, unhurried. But there were two ragged holes in the roof of Moulton's tent. Moulton and Howe were already out of sight of Camp Mark Twain.

Slashing, slicing through the air they came, the handful of adepts who guarded the fire. From five hundred miles to the north they came, racing pigeons hurrying home. Camp councilors, two-thirds of the small group of camp matrons, some few from scattered points on the continent, they came in response to Huxley's call for help and the Senior's unprecedented tocsin. A housewife turned out the fire in the oven and disappeared into the sky. A taxi driver stopped his car and left his fares without a word. Research groups on Shasta broke their tight rapport, abandoned their beloved work, and came—fast!

"And now, Philip?" Howe spoke orally as he arrested his trajectory and hung beside Huxley.

Huxley flung a hand toward Brinckley. "He has what we need to know to strike now! Where's Master Ling?"

"He and Mrs. Draper guard the camp."

"I need him. Can she do it alone?"

Clear and mellow, her voice rang in his head from half a state away,—"I can!"

"The tortoise flies." The second thought held the quality of deathless merriment which was the unmistakable characteristic of the ancient Chinese.

Joan felt a soft touch at her mind, then Master Ling was among them, seated carefully tailor-fashion on nothingness. "I attend; my body follows," he announced. "Can we not proceed?"

Whereupon Joan realized that he had borrowed the facilities of her mind to project himself into their presence more quickly than he could levitate the distance. She felt unreasonably flattered by the attention.

Huxley commenced at once. "Through *his* mind—" He indicated Brinckley "—I have learned of many others with whom there can be no truce. We must search them out, deal with them at once, before they can rally from what has happened to him. But I need help. Master, will you extend the present and examine him? You alone can do it."

Ling had tutored them in discrimination of time and perception of the present, taught them to stand off and perceive duration from eternity. But he was incredibly more skilled than his pupils. He could split the beat of a fly's wing into a thousand instants, or grasp a millenium as a single flash of experience. His discrimination of time and space was bound neither by his metabolic rate nor by his solar dimensions.

Now he poked gingerly at Brinckley's brain like one who seeks a lost jewel in garbage. He felt out the man's memory patterns and viewed his life as one picture. Joan, with amazement, saw his everpresent smile give way to a frown of distaste. His mind had been left open to any who cared to watch. She peered through his mind, then cut off. If there were that many truly vicious spirits in the world, she preferred to encounter them one at a

time, as necessary, not experience them all at once.

Master Ling's body joined the group, melted into his projection.

Huxley, Howe, Moulton, and James followed the Chinese' delicate work with close attention. Howe's face was bleakly impassive; Moulton's face, aged to androgynous sensitivity, moved from side to side while he clucked disapproval of such wickedness.

Ambrose looked more like Mark Twain than ever, Twain in an implacable, lowering rage.

Master Ling looked up. "Yes. yes," said Moulton, "I suppose we must act, Ephraim."

"We have no choice," Huxley stated, with a completely unconscious disregard of precedent. "Will you assign the tasks, Senior?"

Howe glanced sharply at him. "No, Philip. No. Go ahead. Carry on."

Huxley checked himself in surprise for the briefest instant, then took his cue. "You'll help me, Master Ling. Ben!"

"Waiting!"

He meshed mind to mind, had Ling show him his opponent and the data he needed.

—"Got it? Need any help?"

—"Grandfather Stonebender is enough."

"Okay. Nip off and attend to it."

—"Chalk it up." He was gone, a rush of air in his wake.

—"This one is yours, Senator Moulton."

—"I know." And Moulton was gone.

By one's and two's he gave them their assignments, and off they went to do that which must be done. There was no argument. Many of them had been aware long before Huxley was that a day of action must inevitably come to pass, but they had waited with quiet serenity, busy with the work at hand, till time should incubate the seed.

IN A windowless study of a mansion on Long Island, soundproofed, cleverly locked and guarded, ornately furnished, a group of five was met—three men, one woman, and a thing in a wheel chair. It glared at the other four in black fury, glared without eyes, for its forehead dropped unbroken to its cheekbones, a smooth sallow expanse.

A lap robe, tucked loosely across the chair, masked, but did not hide the fact that the creature had no legs.

It gripped the arms of the chair. "Must I do *all* the thinking for you fools?" it asked in a sweet, gentle voice. "You, Arthurson—you let Moulton slip that Shasta Bill past the Senate. Moron." The epithet was uttered caressingly.

Arthurson shifted in his chair. "I examined his mind. The bill was harmless. It was a swap on the Missouri Valley deal. I told you."

"You examined his mind, eh? Hmmm, he led you on a personally conducted tour, you fool. A *Shasta* bill! When will you mindless idiots learn that no good ever came out of Shasta?" It smiled approvingly.

"Well, how was I to know? I thought a camp near the mountain might confuse . . . *them.*"

"Mindless idiot. The time will come when I will find you dispensable." The thing did not wait for the threat to sink in, but continued, "Enough of that now. We must move to repair the damage. *They* are on the offensive now and very dangerous. Agnes—"

"Yes." The woman answered.

"Your preaching has got to pick up—"

"I've done my best."

"Not good enough. I've got to have a wave of religious hysteria that will wash out the Bill of Rights—*before* the Shasta camp breaks up for the summer. We will have to act fast before that time and we can't be hampered by a lot of legalisms."

"It can't be done."

"Shut up. It can be done. Your temple will receive endowments this week which you are to use for countryside television hookups. At the proper time you will discover a new messiah."

"Who?"

"Brother Artemis."

"*That* cornbelt pipsqueak? Where do I come in on this?"

"You'll get yours. But you can't head this movement; the country won't take a woman in the top spot. The two of you will lead a march on Washington and take over. The Sons of '76 will fill out your ranks and do the street fighting. Weems, that's your job."

The man addressed demurred. "It will take three, maybe four months to indoctrinate them."

"You have three weeks. It would be well not to fail."

The last of the three men broke his silence. "What's the hurry, Chief? Seems to me that you are getting yourself in a panic over a few kids."

"I'll be the judge. Now you are to time an epidemic of strikes to tie the country up tight at the time of the march on Washington."

"I'll need some incidents."

"You'll get them. You worry about the unions; I'll take care of the Merchants' and Commerce League myself. You give me one small strike tomorrow. Get your pickets out and I will have four or five of them shot. The publicity will be ready. Agnes, you preach a sermon about it."

"Slanted which way?"

It rolled its non-existent eyes up to the ceiling. "Must I think of everything? It's elementary. Use your *minds.*"

The last man to speak laid down his cigar carefully and said, "What's the real rush, Chief?"

"I've told you."

"No, you haven't. You've kept your mind closed and haven't let us read your thoughts once. You've known about the Shasta camp for months. Why this sudden excitement? You aren't slipping, are you? Come on, spill it. You can't expect us to follow if you are slipping."

The eyeless one looked him over carefully.

"Hanson," he said, in still sweeter tones, "you have been feeling your size for months. Would you care to match your strength with mine?"

The other looked at his cigar. "I don't mind if I do."

"You will. But not tonight. I haven't time to select and train new lieutenants. Therefore I will tell you what the urgency is. I can't raise Brinckley. He's fallen out of communication. There is not *time—*"

"You are correct," said a new voice. "There is not time."

The five jerked puppetlike to face its source. Standing side by side in the study were Ephraim Howe and Joan Freeman.

HOWE looked at the thing.

"I've waited for this meeting," he said cheerfully, "and I've saved you for myself."

The creature got out of its wheelchair and moved through the air at Howe. Its height and position gave an unpleasant sensation that it walked on invisible legs. Howe signalled to Joan,—"It starts. Can you hold the others, my dear?"

—"I think so."

—"Now!" Howe brought to bear everything he had learned in a hundred and thirty busy years, concentrated on the single problem of telekinetic control. He avoided, refused contact with the mind of the evil thing before him and turned his attention to destroying its physical envelope.

The thing stopped.

Slowly, slowly, like a deepsea diver caught in implosion, like an orange in a squeezer, the spatial limits in which it

existed were reduced. A spherical locus in space enclosed it, diminished.

The thing was drawn in and in. The ungrown stumps of its legs folded against its thick torso. The head ducked down against the chest to escape the unrelenting pressure. For a single instant it gathered its enormous perverted power and fought back. Joan was disconcerted, momentarily nauseated by the backwash of evil.

But Howe withstood it without change of expression; the sphere shrank again.

The eyeless skull split. At once, the sphere shrank to the least possible dimension. A twenty-inch ball hung in the air, a ball whose repulsive superficial details did not invite examination.

Howe held the harmless, disgusting mess in place with a fraction of his mind, and inquired,—"Are you all right, my dear?"

—"Yes, Senior. Master Ling helped me once when I needed it."

—"That I anticipated. Now for the others." Speaking aloud he said, "Which do you prefer: To join your leader, or to forget what you know?" He grasped air with his fingers and made a squeezing gesture.

The man with the cigar screamed.

"I take that to be an answer," said Howe. "Very well, Joan, pass them to me, one at a time."

He operated subtly on their minds, smoothing out the patterns of colloidal gradients established by their corporeal experience.

A few minutes later the room contained four sane but infant adults—and a gory mess on the rug.

COBURN stepped into a room to which he had not been invited. "School's out, boys," he announced cheerfully. He pointed a finger at one occupant. "That goes for you." Flame crackled from his fingertip, lapped over his adversary. "And for you." The flames spouted forth a second time. "Yes, and for you." A third received his final cleansing.

BROTHER ARTEMIS, "God's Angry Man," faced the television pick-up. "And if these things be not true," he thundered, "then may the Lord strike me down dead!"

The coroner's verdict of heart failure did not fully account for the charred condition of his remains.

A POLITICAL rally adjourned early because the principal speaker failed to show up. An anonymous beggar was found collapsed over his pencils and chewing gum. A director of nineteen major corporations caused his secretary to have hysterics by breaking off in the midst of dictating to converse with the empty air before lapsing into cheerful idiocy. A celebrated stereo and television star disappeared. Obituary stories were hastily dug out and completed for seven members of Congress, several judges and two governors.

The number of disappearances, sudden deaths, and mental breakdowns which took place among key people on that calendar date were not subjected to statistical analysis for several months, until they came to the attention of a teaching fellow who proved that they could not have happened, and then dropped the matter.

THE USUAL evening sing at Camp Mark Twain took place that night without the presence of Camp Director Moulton. He was attending a full conference of the adepts, assembled all in the flesh for the first time in many years.

Joan looked around as she entered the hall. "Where is Master Ling?" she inquired of Howe.

He studied her face for a moment. For the first time since she had first met him

nearly two years before she thought he seemed momentarily at a loss. "My dear," he said gently, "you must have realized that Master Ling remained with us, not for his own benefit, but for ours. The crisis for which he waited has been met; the rest of the work we must do alone."

A hand went to her throat. "You . . . you mean. . .?"

"He was very old and very weary He had kept his heart beating, his body functioning, by continuous conscious control for these past forty-odd years."

"By why did he not renew and regenerate?"

"He did not wish it. We could not expect him to remain here indefinitely after he had grown up."

"No." She bit her trembling lip. "No. That is true. We are children and he has other things to do . . . but—Oh, Ling! Ling! Master Ling!" She buried her head on Howe's shoulder.

—"Why are you weeping, Little Flower?"

Her head jerked up. —"Master Ling!"

—"Can that *not be* which *has been?* Is there past or future? Have you learned my lessons so poorly? Am I not now with you, as always?" She felt in the thought the vibrant timeless merriment, the gusto for living which was the hallmark of the gentle Chinese.

With a part of her mind she squeezed Howe's hand. "Sorry," she said. "I was wrong." She relaxed as Ling had taught her, let her consciousness flow in the revery which encompasses time in a single deathless now.

Howe, seeing that she was at peace, turned his attention to the meeting.

He reached out with his mind and gathered them together into the telepathic network of full conference. —"I think that you all know why we meet," he thought. —"I have served my time; we enter another and more active period when other qualities than mine are needed. I have called you to consider and pass on my selection of a successor."

Huxley was finding the thought messages curiously difficult to follow. *I must be exhausted from the effort,* he thought to himself.

But Howe was thinking aloud again. —"So be it; we are agreed." He looked at Huxley. "Philip, will you accept the trust?"

"What?"

"You are Senior now—by common consent."

"But . . . but . . . I am not ready."

"We think so," answered Howe evenly. "Your talents are needed now. You will grow under the responsibility."

—"Chin up, pal!" It was Coburn, in private message.

—"It's *all right,* Phil." Joan, that time.

"I will try!" he answered.

ON THE last day of camp Joan sat with Mrs. Draper on a terrace of the home on Shasta, overlooking the valley. She sighed. Mrs. Draper looked up from her knitting and smiled. "Are you sad that the camp is over?"

"Oh, no! I'm glad it is."

"What is it, then?"

"I was just thinking . . . we go to all this effort and trouble to put on this camp. Then we have to fight to keep it safe. Tomorrow those boys go home—then they must be watched, each one of them, while they grow strong enough to protect themselves against all the evil things there are still in the world. Next year there will be another crop of boys, and then another, and another. Isn't there any end to it?"

"Certainly there is an end to it. Don't you remember, in the ancient records, what became of the Elders? When we have done what there is for us to do here, we move on to where there is more to do. The human race was not meant to stay here forever."

"It still seems endless."

"It does, when you think of it that way, my dear. The way to make it seem short and interesting is to think about what one is going to do next. For example, what are you going to do next?"

"Me?" Joan looked perplexed. Her face clear.

"Why . . . why I'm going to get married!" she said.

"I thought so." Mrs. Draper's needles clicked away.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"—and the Truth Shall Make You Free!"

THE GLOBE still swung around the sun. The seasons came and the seasons went. The sun still shone on the mountainsides, the hills were green, and the valleys lush. The river sought its goal in the lap of the sea, then rode the cloud, and found the hills as rain. The cattle cropped in the broad brown plains, the fox stalked the hare through the brush. The tides answered the sway of the moon, and the gulls picked at the wet sand in the wake of the tide. The earth was fair and the earth was full; it teemed with life overflowed with life—a stream in spate.

Nowhere was man.

Seek the high hills; search him in the plains. Hunt for his spoor in the green jungles; call for him; shout for him. Follow where he has been in the bowels of earth; plumb the dim deeps of the sea.

Man is gone; his house stands empty; the door open.

A great ape, with a brain too big for his need, and a spirit that troubled him, left his tribe and sought the quiet of the high place that lay above the jungle. He climbed it, hour after hour, urged on by a need that he half understood. He reached a resting place, high above the green trees of his home, higher than any of his tribe had ever climbed. There he found a broad flat stone, warm in the sun. He lay down upon it and slept.

But his sleep was troubled. He dreamed strange dreams, unlike anything he knew. They woke him and left him with an aching head.

It would be many generations before one of his line could understand what was left there by those who had departed.

THE BIPED, REEGAN

★

The strongest man, the last woman, at bay against a world that had destroyed their fellows, take a last grim gamble with eternity that the human race might survive.

★

By ALFRED BESTER

IF IT please your Imperial Maternity, the day is won. I have here the full report of the last victory, and if your Imperial Maternity would deign to listen. . . ?

At the first light our forces were drawn up at the crest of the semicircle of hills surrounding the bipeds' last citadel. In the ten moons following our first attack on their cities, only this last stronghold prevailed. Within were less than two hundred bipeds. Like a sickle, our armies pressed close.

We were at all times within close observation of the enemy. Spy-alpha had slipped through their traps and barriers during the dark and had taken up a post in the vast room in which the bipeds were accustomed to meet and talk. Spy-alpha telecasted to us shortly after the first light that the bipeds were entering the room, and all of us picked up his thought band.

They came in slowly, those bipeds, for they were desperate. The big one with flushed face and beard, called Otis, banged his hand on the table.

"It's hopeless," he said. "What if we do win out?"

The biped with red hair interrupted. "Not *if*," he said. "We shall. Chung and I have something new. It can't fail. We've been working on it for two months."

Then the biped with slant eyes, the one called Chung, nodded.

"In some ways," he said, "the attack of the ants has worked miracles. First, it ended a war between the Chinese and Whites. Second, it has provided a necessity that is proving to be the mother of miracles. Between Ivar's technique and my theory we have created a new thermodynamics. . ."

"You're too long-winded," Ivar said.

"You're both too optimistic," Otis added. "When do we see this miracle worker of yours? What's it all about?"

"Not yet," Ivar replied. "In three hours it'll be ready for a final demonstration. Not now."

"And if it works?" Otis asked.

"Then we win," said Chung.

"Win what?" Otis demanded. "A slow and sorry death for the race and two hundred men. Two hundred *men*, I said. You don't seem to understand. The race of man is dead. It died with the last woman. You're only prolonging the inevitable."

Ivar said: "I'd rather make a fight of it . . . No matter how hopeless it is. You too, Otis. You're just depressed."

At that moment the vast portal to the room was smashed open and one of the biped underlings rushed in. He lifted his hand to his forehead and poured out a message so excitedly that Spy-alpha had difficulty following, and so did we. The gist of it, however, was that the ants were attacking.

Instantly we telecast across the entire field of battle. Not an attack was reported in progress, although Marshal-gamma announced that he had moved one hundred thirty thousand of his troops forward slightly to maintain an even line across the crest of the ridge. We turned our attention then back to Spy-alpha in the meeting room of the bipeds.

They were in a state of alarm, doubtless convinced from the reported troop movements that our attack was coming. The red-haired biped, Ivar, was especially concerned.

"I must have three hours more," he repeated over and over. "Three hours will make the difference between success and failure. Can you give Chung and me three hours?"

"I'd like to," Otis said, "but how?"

"I'LL tell you how!"

It was the biped, Reegan . . . The one of great daring whose long lean body and reckless lean face we had all grown to hate and fear. The numbers of us whom he had killed mounted to the millions. A wave of fury leaped across the battlefield as all of us telecast our hatred of Reegan. At the room of the bipeds, Spy-alpha warned us to be quiet lest we miss an important detail.

"If we sit here and wait," Reegan snarled, "we can sit and wait until the ants make up their minds what they want to do with us. Waiting's no good. It just plays right into their hands. Ivar wants three hours? Hell, I'll give him sixty-three."

"How?" asked Otis.

"Counter-attack," Reegan snapped. "Give me a suicide squad. Ten men, that's all. I'll go out there and blast the guts off them!"

"The man is crazy," spoke the biped, Chung.

"Sure I'm crazy," Reegan said. "I'm crazy with waiting. I've only got a lifetime to live, and I know there's nothing worth living for anyway. If I die and I've given Ivar his three hours . . . then what the hell?"

Chung said: "What would you do?"

"I'll take ten men and torches," Reegan said. "I'll go out there and stay out until I'm dead. It ought to take them three hours to chew me to pieces. Me and the rest. . ."

"No," said Otis, "I can't let you."

"I'm going anyway," Reegan said. "I'd like to see you stop me."

He arose to his full height and faced the biped, Otis. He raised hand to brow languidly and started out of the chamber. Spy-alpha rushed to precede him so as to learn the site of Reegan's attack, and just then the biped Otis clutched Reegan by the arms.

"One more step," he said, "and I call the guard. No plan is worth your suicide, Reegan."

The biped Reegan shook the arm away. Otis clutched him once more and this time Reegan raised his fist and smote Otis full in the face. He was already out the door when Otis arose and began to shout for the guard. The biped Ivar quieted him.

"Let him alone, Otis," he said. "Don't you know the poor guy's been looking to die since he lost his girl? You'll be doing him a favor if you'll let him kill himself . . . And you'll be saving the rest of us."

SPY-ALPHA picked up no more of their vibrations, for he had slipped under the portal and was following the biped Reegan down the hall. When he had caught up, the biped Reegan had already summoned ten others, some with the slant eyes and others with the white faces. They were donning the tight suits of metal fabrix with the glass helmets and Reegan was handing out the torches.

Our research legions are at present investigating these torches, Imperial Maternity. They consist of large tanks which the bipeds strap over their backs. From the tanks lead two hoses which join in a metal nozzle held in the hand. It is believed that two kinds of substance are carried in different compartments of the tank, and when these substances are mingled at the nozzle, they burst into flame.

"Here is the plan," Reegan said. "We go out through the north gate. From there we. . ."

At this point he uttered an exclamation and Spy-alpha telecast that he had been spotted by biped Reegan. All of us received the blurred impression that he was fleeing rapidly for cover, and then his telecasts ceased. So passed another happy sacrifice for your Imperial Maternity.

Commander-lambda immediately dispatched Spy-zeta and Spy-zeta-prime to the citadel of the bipeds to break through along the same route that Spy-alpha had worked out. Meanwhile the scout legion was advanced slightly to await the first appearance of the biped sortie and report its direction.

The sickle of hills, as your Imperial Maternity doubtless knows, is the length of eight hundred and eight bipeds. It is a perfect formation, the arc of a circle, and at each point, the same distance from the bipeds' citadel as it is long. The height of the hills vary, the tallest being the central flat-topped peak which covers the mouth of the caverns.

The hills are not steep, for they lead down toward the citadel in a gentle slope which makes our attack easier. Moreover the slope is entirely covered with a low dry vegetation which makes for better concealment.

It was an hour after first-light that the scout legion sighted Reegan and the squad. They immediately telecast back and we saw that they were headed due north toward the tall central peak of the hills. Although we had nothing to fear from the bipeds in the long run, it was judged advisable to keep them as far as possible from the cavern mouth, lest they disrupt the mechanism which is our in-

spiration and very life, as you are aware.

Marshal-alpha, on the left flank, suggested that he be permitted to show his troops so as to lure the bipeds to that side of the hills, and permission was immediately granted by Commander-lambda who, at the same time, ordered Marshal-delta to begin moving troops from the left center toward the left flank to cover the gap that would be created by the maneuver.

At the order your Imperial Maternity's troops clambered to the heights of the dry vegetation by the tens of thousands, and permitted the bright light to glisten on their jet chiton. Almost immediately, the shimmer of light was noticed by the bipeds, who halted and consulted. Fortunately our scout legions were thick in the neighborhood and partially able to translate the bipeds' communication at that important crisis.

The biped Reegan said: "Hell, thousands of them!"

"Lucky for us," said a second. "We can burn up the (word not understood by the scout legion) by the millions without even trying. It's easy."

"Yeah," said Reegan, "it's too easy. That's what makes me suspicious. The trouble with you guys is that you never figure these little black vermin can think. I tell you they can. They're smart. Smarter than we or they have ever been!"

Nevertheless they turned west toward Marshal-alpha's exposed troops and began to advance. Inasmuch as their plan was designed to delay our attack for three hours . . . that, Imperial Maternity, is a period equal to one quarter a light or one quarter a darkness . . . we had decided to finish them off quickly. Commander-lambda had already announced that the first faint telecasts from the red armies had been received. The red armies were reinforcements coming up from the south and were expected to arrive by mid-light.

MARSHAL-ALPHA had not intended to let the troops throw themselves away. The first waves for a distance of ten bipeds remained concealed under the vegetation. It was not until they reported that the bipeds had passed them that the order was given for an attack.

Immediately the troops rushed down the slope from the crest of the hill toward the squad. These at once ignited the torches, which hissed out flame to the distance of two bipeds. The van of the charge was seared to death instantly, but the following waves plunged over their ashes toward the bipeds. And as the bipeds advanced in a rank toward the hill-crest, Marshal-alpha ordered the concealed troops behind them to attack by stealth.

Unfortunately the biped Reegan was alert. Glancing backward, he noticed the action in the rear and instantly called orders to the others. They formed a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder, surrounding themselves with a roaring fiery curtain. In that fashion they slowly reached the crest of the hill and began moving toward the central peak.

Matters were becoming serious when several of the troops just before death reported that one of the bipeds was throwing flame with his left hand. This meant that an occasional gap was left between himself and the biped to the right of him. When this was understood, troops immediately began to filter through the flame and wait inside until their numbers had grown.

Although the bipeds wore the metal fabrix for protection, it had a tactical disadvantage that ultimately proved to be their downfall. They could not sense the attack of our troops on their person. Thus, slowly from the inside, our troops mounted the backs of the bipeds until they were thousands thick from nape to heel. Then, when they had telecast readi-

ness, Marshal-alpha gave the order.

The attack was an instant success. As our troops bit through the fabrix and swarmed to the skin of the bipeds, they screamed and broke formation. Despite the shouts of Reegan, they dropped the torches and writhed on the ground, striking at themselves with their palms. Instantly they were covered by hordes of our troops, who had been waiting for this.

Two of the bipeds scorched themselves to death with their own torches. The others struggled and screamed for a long time before the venom of our troops then to both sides, the biped Reegan escaped. Despite the thousands of wounds that our troops were inflicting, he ran calmly and swiftly across the crest of the hills, throwing the destructive flame as he ran. When he reached the central peak, from which we had been attempting to lure him, he climbed to the surface of the broad flat stone that covers the cavern mouth, and flamed it clear.

Then, despite the agony of his wounds, he lay down carefully and rolled slowly from face to back and then from back to face, pressing the inside of his fabrix suit between the weight of his body and the stone. In such manner he succeeded in crushing those of our troops who had penetrated to his skin. It was a cool device.

Commander-lambda was rushing troops toward the stone in hopes of occupying the biped Reegan with another attack before he discovered the secret, when suddenly Reegan felt the stone shift on its pivots under his weight. He was the quickest, the most alert of the bipeds, and in little time he had swung the stone back, revealing the broad steps that led down into the cavern.

THROWING the flame before him, Reegan descended slowly and curiously until at last he reached the foot of the steps. Commander-lambda had already telecast warnings, and fresh troops were massing along the floor of the cavern to await Reegan. The digger legions were rapidly boring passages down to the roof in hopes that our troops might be able to drop down on Reegan from above.

Unfortunately he moved forward too rapidly for us. Keeping his torch in continual rotation from ceiling to floor and then to both sides, the biped Reegan, passed down the length of the vast cavern until he reached the heavy oak portal which barred the way to the machine room.

This door he burned through, and as it sagged away, he kicked it down and passed into the great domed chamber where the machine lay.

As your Imperial Maternity is no doubt aware, the machine room is a circular vault, the distance of ten bipeds across and almost as high. In the center is the machine itself. It is a structure so complicated that it defies description. All we know is that it is fed with ore from the pits around the chamber and secretes the gas that is our life and inspiration from crystal tubes which lead to the surface above.

To one side of the machine are the two great masses of straw where the bipeds who made and now tend the machine, sleep. There is a great wooden chamber where their foodstuff is kept, and a high wooden structure where they eat. The chamber was at all times surrounded on the inside with thousands of our troops who, by the continual menace of their presence, kept the bipeds from escaping and forced them to continue the operation of the machine.

These troops Reegan instantly flamed to death. As he was staring at the machine and listening to its soft hiss, he suddenly became aware of the bipeds lying on the straw masses. He emitted a peculiar sound and ran to them.

"Dinah!" he cried. "In God's name . . . I must be mad!"

She raised her head and cried out. Then Reegan threw his arms about her and crushed her to him. The both of them emitted peculiar sobbing sounds continually and totally ignored the ancient biped with the hairless skull, who gazed at them in astonishment.

AS Commander-lambda received the reports of the biped's peculiar actions, he deemed it wise to attempt a fresh attack. The cavern and steps were already choked with our troops, who were ready at all costs to prevent an escape.

The biped Dinah said: "Wes, darling, this is Doctor Elmer Gropper."

Reegan nodded curtly and aided the ancient biped called Doctor Elmer Gropper to his feet. "There's no time for talk," Reegan said. "First let me get you back to the fort. I can hear all about everything there."

He rekindled his torch and flamed the broken chamber entrance. Then he swiftly removed the metal fabrix suit and forced the biped called Dinah to don it. The biped named Doctor Elmer Gropper was too weak to travel, and Reegan lifted him to his shoulder.

Then the biped called Dinah said: "Wes. . . . Please destroy the apparatus. You'll find out why later. But do it . . ."

Reegan . . . for although she named him "Wes" she spoke to him . . . turned and played the flame over the machine. It fused and exploded, filling the chamber with a maze of small broken parts. I fear, Imperial Maternity, that we shall never be able to reconstruct it, but in my subsequent report you will see that it is unimportant.

Our troops charged valiantly as the three bipeds came through the cavern. Reegan, without the metal suit, was especially open to attack, but he moved with infinite caution, carefully flaming the four sides of the tunnel before he would advance a step. Despite our every effort he managed to reach the stairs and mount them.

It was impossible to hold him back once he began descending the slope and we deemed it wiser to let him return to the citadel of the bipeds, where we could attack at our leisure. Our troops drew off and Commander-lambda telecast a message to Spy-zeta and Spy-zeta-prime. All of us caught their response, clear and calm. Zeta-prime was stationed in the council room of the bipeds; Zeta was trailing the biped Ivar, in an attempt to ferret out the new weapon he had spoken of.

The destruction of the machine was a crushing blow to the morale of your Imperial Maternity's troops. Commander-lambda sent out an inspiring message to all of us that victory would still be ours. He commanded us to realign in our old positions along the crest of the sickle of hills and await the arrival of the red armies from the south.

Meanwhile Reegan had reached the citadel. We all tuned in on Spy-zeta-prime to see what future developments might impend. The three bipeds rushed up to the council room, where they were met by the biped Otis and others.

As the biped Dinah removed her metal suit, Otis gasped and stared hard at her.

"A woman!" he cried.

Your Imperial Maternity is no doubt familiar with the anatomy of the male and female of the species. The bipeds discerned differences in sex by vision. The biped Reegan, for example, was tall and built in flat planes to the general outline of a wedge.

The female named Dinah was somewhat shorter and built in curved planes. The shoulders were rounded, the thorax fuller than Reegan's and divided into two upthrust mounds. The waist was extremely narrow but the hips were rounded

and almost as wide as the shoulders. Altogether, our research legions believe the species of biped to be the ugliest life-form our earth has produced.

SPY-ZETA-PRIME reported tremendous excitement at the appearance of the strange bipeds and especially at the appearance of the female. Then, as they calmed down, Reegan spoke.

"Otis," he said, "this is Dinah. Dinah Shaw. If I've acted like a fool in the past months, it was because I'd thought she was dead."

Otis said: "My God, Reegan, but you're lucky. . . . To find your girl again. . . . To bring her back from the dead!"

"Not as incredible as you think," the biped named Doctor Elmer Gropper said. Spy-zeta-prime reported that he was extremely faint, and this was immediately corroborated by the chamber troops who had been guarding that ancient biped.

"Before I tell my story," Doctor Elmer Gropper said, "you'd better tell me yours. We've been pent up in that damned cavern for ten months."

"It's a wonder you're both so healthy looking," Otis said. "Miss Shaw actually looks beautiful . . . "

"You'll understand when I tell you my story," Gropper said. "For that matter, you've probably noticed by now that all of you are much healthier . . . handsomer and probably more acutely intelligent. Never mind that. Tell."

"It's not much of a story," Otis said. "Ten months ago we began a war with the Asiaffs. I don't mind saying that things were desperate for America. The Affs on one side and the Asians on the other were pressing us hard. We thought we'd been defeated when overnight every city in the Western Hemisphere was destroyed, down to the foundations. All of them simply dissolved and sank thundering into the earth. Millions were killed. . . .

"Then, slowly, the news began to filter through that the same thing had happened to Asia, Africa and Europe. Every city throughout the world had been destroyed. We began to realize that the same menace was striking at both war parties. . . . Then the ants came. By the billions, they came. They swept over us, destroying food, supplies, communications . . . and lastly us."

"That's all the story?" Gropper asked.

"Enough of it. I don't like to think of my wife . . . of my friends . . . " Otis shuddered. "It's enough to say that the world banded together against the onslaught of the ants too late. We here are the last survivors of a murdered world . . ."

There was a long silence while the bipeds reflected drearily on the swift, sure tactics of your Imperial Maternity's troops that had brought them so low. At last the biped named Doctor Elmer Gropper spoke.

"And I," he said, "murdered your world. No . . . don't interrupt. I want to tell you. It won't be long before none of us are alive to care. . . . Well. . . . The story starts twenty years ago at the close of the Second World War. It seemed to me that nothing could ever prevent another war except man himself, and I thought that man was too underdeveloped to ever do that. I decided to help man develope . . ."

"You're crazy!" the red-haired biped, Ivar, said.

"No," Gropper answered. "In theory I was right. I reasoned that some time in the far future when man had advanced enough intellectually, he would give up killing. My attempt was to speed up this advancement . . . this artificial evolution of man . . .

"Yes, it could be done. The history of the world bore me out. Evolution had not been a slow, steady progress. It had leaped forward in sudden advances . . .

and I discovered what had caused those advances."

The biped Reegan said: "What did?"

"Gas, strangely enough," Gropper replied. "Radon gas. When it is present in the atmosphere in sufficient quantities, it acts as a catalyst on chromosomatic genes. It induces a chemical reaction in the molecules that are the characteristic-carriers and causes those jumps in development that De Vries called mutations and Darwin called the Survival of the Fittest."

"Yes," the precise biped, Chung, said. "That is more than possible."

"It's a reality," the female, Dinah, put in.

"Altogether too real," Gropper continued. "I built that cavern twenty years ago and constructed my apparatus there. Those hills are rich in pitchblende. Twenty years ago the Radon gas began to pour forth and I was jubilant. I knew that within a decade, perhaps two, evolution would strike at man and advance him far beyond war and the destructive arts. But last year, when I hired Miss Shaw as my assistant and we descended to the cavern to check the equipment that had been operating for two decades, I realized the horrible error I had made."

Reegan said: "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Evolution is mysterious," Gropper said. "Some hundred and fifty million years ago the earth and the seas were dominated by the great reptiles. They were the masters of creation. But inhabiting the earth with them lived a small retiring rat-like creature, utterly insignificant in size. Yet in time . . . in evolution, that rat-like creature took over dominance from the reptiles. . . . Became man. . . . Became us."

"We all know that," Otis put in.

"But this you forget," Gropper said. "Man conquered the reptiles because he had a quality they lacked. Intelligence. Intelligence conquered brawn, although brawn was more powerful. But intelligence is not the supreme goal of evolution; it is only one of its phases, and just as brawn gave way to intelligence, so our intelligence is giving way to a quality we don't possess, but which is possessed by the species that will dominate the earth through it!"

In precise tones Chung said: "Thought transference!"

"That's it," Gropper cried. "Thought transference! The ants had it. Now, through artificial stimulation, it has been advanced and developed. . . . Just as your own intelligence has been quickened noticeably. But though you become geniuses, all of you, you will not cope with the ants. That quality of thought-transferance will defeat you, just as our brains defeated the more powerful reptilian brawn. How will you fight an army of billions that think as one?"

The biped with red hair said: "Take it easy. We can. Give intelligence just one more try and it may win out. Chung and I have finished our work. Come and see. . . "

FOLLOWED by Spy-zeta-prime, the group of bipeds arose and left the council room. As they began to descend the vast ramp to the ground level, Spy-zeta-prime telecast to Spy-zeta to pick them up in the great square courtyard in the middle of the citadel. This was done and we tuned in on Spy-zeta.

The bipeds were clustering around a structure of high-polished metal which the red-hair and slant-eye were demonstrating. It was of the shape of a short earthworm, very straight and the length of twenty bipeds.

"Looks like a rocket," Otis said.

"Exactly what it is. Double-skinned walls so that the blasted lice can't get through. Room inside for two, plus supplies. We can go out in this and swoop

over the countryside and blast them to hell with the rocket discharges."

"What's the fuel?" Gropper asked.

"Uranium 235. It breaks down under a cyclotron cross-fire. Practically, I think we've got atomic power. All I know is that one gram of fuel burns for one hour, emitting about six billion calories of heat and exerting a constant pressure of twenty six point five tons per square inch. The rear half is filled with fuel. . . . Enough to blow this baby to Andromeda and back. . . . Enough to burn every lousy ant twice out of the earth!"

At this message, Commander-lambda was extremely alarmed, and his unrest immediately permeated the rest of your Imperial Maternity's troops. It would have been sheer folly for us to have waited supiently for the attack of the bipeds, and consequently the Commander telecast orders for an immediate attack on the citadel. The red armies marching up from the south he ordered to attack as soon as they reached the citadel, without pause for rest.

It was a glorious hour for your Imperial Maternity. Thirty billions of us marched down the slope toward the citadel of the bipeds. And so great was the interest of the bipeds in the infernal machine that we were not sighted until our first waves reached the water trap that ringed the Citadel.

Without hesitation, our troops plunged into the deep ditches and swam toward the far side. Quickly, chains of living troops were made, and from these chains, living bridges were built. Across these bridges swarmed your Maternity's loyal legions.

THE second water trap proved to be a trap indeed. Barely had we reached it when it flamed into the air to prodigious heights . . . a curtain of thick fire. Commander-lambda telecast the battle-word: "Forward" and so our troops moved. By the hundreds of thousands they threw themselves into the pool of flame, glorious sacrifices for your Imperial Maternity. Within a short space the fires were smothered by the countless numbers of blackened, charred bodies. The troops reached the citadel walls.

They clambered up like a great rising black wave, directly in the face of the thundering torches which the bipeds wielded at the top. And though they fell backwards in a hail of infinite numbers, the commander knew we must break through this time or else fail forever.

Then, faintly, we received vibrations from the red armies that they had sighted the citadel. Quick to seize on opportunities, Commander-lambda ordered the red armies to advance with all possible speed and show themselves as soon as possible to the bipeds. Our own troops he ordered to concentrate at the south side.

As Commander-lambda planned, so it took place. Solid waves of our troops pressed at the south wall. The bipeds were forced to flame their torches incessantly without fail. Yet one looked up for an instant and saw the flashing approach of the red armies. He gasped and called to the biped next to him. Together they stared for less than a moment, yet in that time hundreds of our troops had passed the crest of the battlements.

They died, Imperial Maternity, but in the moment when the bipeds were flaming them down along the wall-top, still other troops poured over the crest, and yet more and more until we had taken foothold at the parapet. We had forced a breach in the wall and from that moment, victory was ours.

Steadily we forced the bipeds back from the walls, and our billions swarmed through the citadel, routing them out of their corners and chambers. They fought well, but they fell. All of them.

It was when the bipeds were falling quickly and filling the citadel with their shrieks that Reegan and Dinah rushed to

the lower courtyard. Spy-zeta was still there, reporting to us.

"It's all up, Wes!" Ivar cried. "We're finished. Get into the rocket ship . . . you and Dinah. Get to hell out of here!"

"Why us?" Reegan demanded. "Why not you and Chung? It's your ship . . ."

"Chung is dead!" Ivar panted. "Otis is up there, screaming on the wall. Do what I say, will you? Get in! I've shown you how to operate her. Rocket to Hawaii. . . . To Mars. . . . Anywhere, To Mars. . . . Anywhere you like, only get only get away, Adam and Eve . . ."

The red-haired Ivar snatched up a torch, slung it over his shoulder and began flaming us back.

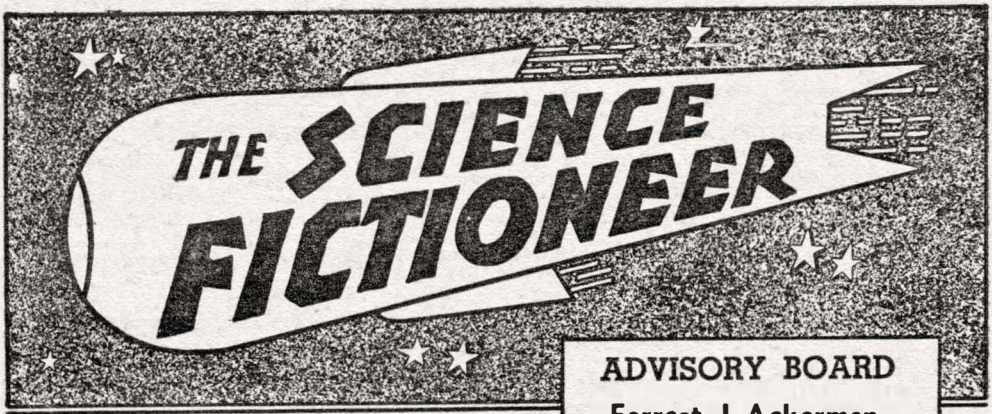
"For God's sake!" he cried. "Will you go?"

They leaped into the mechanism and the heavy portal clanged shut. For a time there was silence. Then suddenly the earth and air was filled with flame and roaring, and the very walls of the bipeds' citadel cracked and crushed down over us.

And when at last the dust and blackness were gone, the citadel was in ruins. The courtyard was merely overturned earth with fragments of broken stone protruding. Of the mechanism, of the biped Ivar, or the others there was no sign.

Intelligence-mu of the Research Legions persists that the mechanism was a machine for piercing the skies to reach to the very light on high, and claims that it carried off the two bipeds and unfortunate Spy-zeta with it; but I cannot help believing that they have destroyed themselves.

So, if it please your Imperial Maternity, the day is won. On all earth there is no living biped. The earth, the air and the waters . . . all there is in the world is yours. Everything is yours, Imperial Maternity, as am I also. . . . Your most humble and very obedient servant. . . .



Official Organ of
The Science Fictioneers

MODERN design hit science fiction fandom (or "fankind" as the newest-coined term has it) when the third world science fiction convention, held this year at the Hotel Shirley-Savoy in Denver, July 4, 5, and 6, went on the record literally! Fan Walter J. Daugherty and his bride, neé Eleanor O'Brien, both of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, not only chose the "Denvention" as their honeymoon spot, but also brought along a huge stack of uncut records, plus equipment, and proceeded to record all the speeches, as well as making innumerable unofficial fan records.

Following the precedent set at the first and second world stf conventions, held in New York and Chicago respectively, a prominent stf figure was chosen as guest of honor, this year's selectee being Lieutenant Robert A. Heinlein, U.S.N. (retired). Lt. Heinlein, who is well known throughout the fan world for his stories, delivered an address entitled "The Discovery of the Future" wherein he spoke of the fundamental differences between fankind and the rest of mankind and of the place of fankind in the world as things are today.

Fankind, said Lt. Heinlein, differs from the rest of mankind in that it does its time-binding in a really cosmic scale. Time-binding, he explained, is a scientific term used to distinguish man from other animals: man alone is capable of living in the past, present, and future and knitting the three together for his own ends. But while mankind looks ahead and plans ahead in terms of days, weeks, months, years, and perhaps in some instances decades, fankind thinks racially, in terms of eons. While mankind can visualise small, immediate changes in the world about itself, fankind alone is aware of the tremendous changes which will make the world of tomorrow as totally different from that of today as the world of today is from that of yesterday—the world of our grandparents.

A national fan organization formed for the specific purpose of putting on the convention, the Colorado Fantasy Society, was the sponsor of the affair. Starting to work shortly after the cessation of festivities at the Chicago Science Fiction Convention of last year, the Denvention Committee, composed of Olon F. Wiggins (chairman), Lew Martin (secretary-treasurer), and Roy Hunt (official artist and editor), made all the necessary arrangements for obtaining the meeting place, enlisting the support of the various fan organizations and individual fans, and obtaining needed publicity through notices in the professional science fiction magazines. An attractive 20-page souvenir booklet was printed for the occasion, and fans and pros alike invited to advertise therein. Reading the list of members of the CFS, the senders-in of individual "booster" ads, and the various officials and sub-functionaries is much like reading a catalogue of the truly active people in fandom.

Although the official date for the Denvention was the 4th, 5th, and 6th, the fans began to trickle into Denver around the end of June, and by the 3rd of July, the trickle became a pour. More so than in the case of the two preceding it, this was a convention of the fans, by the fans, and for the fans. In the two previous years, attendance had been fairly well split between professionals and fans for the first day's session, the numbers then dwindling down to the dyed-in-the-wool enthusiasts as the second and third days rolled around. But this year the pros in attendance could be counted on the fingers of one's hands. Not that this was entirely

desirable, perhaps, but it did make the Denvention truly unique.

However, the "pros" in attendance were by no means lost in the festivities as most of them are indistinguishable from fans, anyway. Super Science Novels' popular S. D. Gottesman was on the spot, as was Hugh Raymond, Astonishing Stories' Lee Gregor, and Advisory Board members Donald A. Wollheim and Robert W. Lowndes, who have recently turned to editing science-fiction magazines of their own. Super Science Novels' Willard E. Hawkins, who lives in Denver, also dropped in to give the fans his best wishes, as did Stf Agent Julie Schwartz and author Edmond Hamilton, en route to New York from the coast.

Among the notables in the fan-world present were world stfan number 1, Forrest J. Ackerman and his inseparable pal, Morojo, as well as LASFS members Paul Freehafer, Frank Brady, and T. Bruce Yerke; Advisory Board members Milton A. Rothman and Robert A. Madle; Pacificoaster, J. J. Fortier; E. E. Evans and John Millard of Michigan, both from the Galactic Roamers; Dale Hart of Texas; Erle Korshak and Walter C. Liebscher of Chicago, the latter being no mean piano tickler, along with Milt Rothman; Art Widner and John Bell of the Boston Stranger Club; Julie Unger of Brooklyn; Cyril Kornbluth and Chester Cohen, of the Futurian Society of New York, who jaunted out to the west coast in May and met fellow Futurians John B. Michel, Don Wollheim, and Doc Lowndes in Denver, and Damon Knight, of Oregon, who migrated back to Gotham with aforementioned New Yorkers to take up residence in the city's hotbed of professional and fan activity, the Futurian Embassy.

A costume party was held on the evening of the first day, in line with the tradition set down at Chicago, and bellhops and innocent guests at the hotel were alternately amused and horrified at the weird and outré figures emerging from the upper floors to parade toward the convention hall. Each masquerader was supposed to give some sort of character sketch along with his or her costume, and prizes were awarded to the three best. Easily taking first prize was E. E. Evans' truly remarkable getup as a bird-creature from Rigel, while Walt Daugherty, as a man from the future complete with transparent helmet and speaking tube, and Forry Ackerman, as The Hunchback of Notre Dame, took second and third prizes respectively. Guest of honor Robert A. Heinlein brought forth a chuckle with his post as "the world's most lifelike robot," while his wife Leslyn brought forth admiration with her costume as Niafer from Cabel's "Figures of Earth." Morojo came as a frog-woman, from A. Merritt's immortal "Moon Pool," while Bill Deutsch and Chet Cohen took their cues from the Heinlein stories and came as Lazarus Pinero and Nehemiah Scudder respectively; the former made hilarious predictions as to the life-lines of some in attendance, while the latter, as the fiery prophet, preached damnation to all. S. D. Gottesman made a stir as a mad scientist with blood (literally) on his hands, and Doc Lowndes shambled about as a zombie.

Setting a new precedent, Walt Daugherty presented five medals to persons selected as deserving especial notice for fan work during the year. For top-notch fan activity he chose Forrest J. Ackerman; for first-rate artwork in fan magazines, the medal went to Roy Hunt of Denver; Olon F. Wiggins' *Science Fiction Fan* took top honors for best fan magazine, while Damon Knight was selected as top humorist of 1941 and, by no means least, Julie Unger's *Fantasy Fiction Field Illustrated News Weekly* took the prize for reliable reporting.

The annual auction, presided over by Erle Korshak, was, as usual, a tremendous success. Super Science Novels' artist, Hannes Bok, had an original present which brought down over $9, while original covers from other stf mags went for $5 and up. Bidding was heated and furious, although bidders this year were on the lookout for "Old Hotfoot" Gottesman, who made things warm at Chicago last time. Particularly fought-over were a cover by Eliot Dold, an interior by Virgil Finlay, and a cover by Frank R. Paul. In addition to original illustrations, costumes, books, and fan magazines were auctioned off, and a note of hilarity entered in which Ed Hamilton bid for Julie Schwartz on an item and Schwartz found himself stuck with it. The item in question was a paper maché skull worn by Erle Korshak at the masquerade and the auctioneer was Bob Heinlein who took the stand for a lark and then found that Daugherty had turned the recording machine on when he wasn't looking.

Closing this year's convention was the banquet given in honor of Lieutenant Heinlein, wherein all present were introduced separately and given full leave to say on as the mood struck them. A birthday remembrance of books was presented to the honor guest (his birthday being July 7th) and all in attendance autographed the volumes, adding personal lines. As the evening wore on to a close, the gathering reluctantly dispersed, all pledging support and voicing their hopes and intentions of being present at 1942's convention, which will be held in Los Angeles.

TUMITHAK OF THE TOWERS OF FIRE

Death prowled the land with a hungry tread, and the Venus fire was the only law, as Tumithak of the Corridors came out of the pits of darkness to make his last great fight to reclaim the earth for his people.

Foreward:

FIVE thousand years ago, the savage shelks of Venus invaded this planet and drove Man from his proud place as master of the earth's Surface into the pits and corridors, where he was to skulk in fear and terror for twenty long centuries.

Three thousand years ago, the first pitmen emerged from their hole and defied the dominant race of shelks. From that moment, the war between shelk and man waged unrelenting until, some eight hundred years later, the last shelk was killed. Today, after a period of dark ages during which both shelk wisdom and human science almost died, Man is again winning back his once proud place upon the earth, and we can even claim that some few sciences have been established on as firm a foundation as before the Invasion.

Among these sciences (as a natural result of our search for the secrets of the ancients) are the ones related to geology and archeology. We know far more today then we did a hundred years ago of the life of mankind in the golden days before the coming of the shelks; and we know far more, too, of the life of those strange ancestors of ours who spent their whole lives in the pits and corridors under the Surface, in those long-gone days when the Beasts of Venus were lords of all the earth.

And among the many legends which have grown slowly through the passing centuries, the greatest has always been that of Tumithak of Loor. It is little wonder that this is so, for both legend and verified history have portrayed him as the first man to brave the dangers of the Surface after the long generations of pit-dwelling which our ancestors endured.

Now among all the tales of wonder, magic and prophecy which make up the saga of Tumithak, some few, stripped of their incredibility, give us an outline of events that might well be historical and reasonably accurate. The story of Tumithak's first journey to the Surface, for instance, or the one which tells of his arousing and leading his men to capture the little city of Shawn. . . And also, there is the story of his adventures in Kaymak.

The first two stories appeared in print long ago. The third the author presents here, in the hope that readers have not forgotten "Tumithak of the Corridors."

★ ★ By CHARLES R. TANNER ★ ★

CHAPTER ONE

Incredible Rescue

THE room in which the workers toiled was about a hundred feet square, and windowless. The fact that the floor, walls and high ceiling were all of the same glassy brown composition suggested that the room was underground, as indeed it was. And on the far right, a flight of stairs running up the side of the wall, a broad flight with an ornate, carved balustrade, added any necessary proof to the fact.

There must have been thirty of the machines at which the workers busied themselves. On the side of the machines nearest the workers, a complicated series of thermometer-like tubes appeared, a half-dozen levers, and a small hopper. Each worker was engaged in slowly pouring into the hopper a substance that had the appearance of powdered iron, meanwhile watching carefully the gauges, his free hand hovering over the levers.

Most of the workers were old men, weak old men with looks of hopeless despair on their faces. Others, a few, were younger looking, but the same look of almost resigned hopelessness covered their faces. Indeed, there were but four in the entire company whose faces showed any signs of vigor or of hope. And these four sat close to the platform and the bottom of the steps, where their masters might keep a sharp eye on them and be ready at a moment's notice to whip back any signs of rebellion.

Their masters! There were two of them, standing on untiring limbs on the low dais-like platform at the foot of the stairs, with their assistants squatting at their feet. Strange as those assistants would seem to men of today, their strangeness was nothing compared to that of their masters.

For their masters were not men at all, but shelks, savage but intelligent beasts from another world, who had ruled over the Surface from time immemorial. They were crustacean-like creatures; indeed, they might have been mistaken for gigantic lobsters at a distance. They had ten limbs, hairless and not at all unlike greatly elongated fingers.

Their bodies, reddish in hue, were shaped a good deal like a wasp's abdomen, and seated directly upon that body, with no sign of a neck, was a head that was startling in its resemblance to a human one.

Save for the fact that it was hairless and had a grim thinness to the lips that no man had ever had, a shelk's head might have been that of a man.

Their assistants were men. At least, they had the form of men. But none of the toiling slaves considered them as such. To them they were mogs—fawning, dog-like descendants of the men who had surrendered to the shelks in that ancient day when the beasts of Venus had conquered earth and driven the most of the race into the pits and corridors where they still lived.

Time and breeding had changed the mogs considerably. Few of them were less than six and a half feet tall, and most of them were closer to seven. Their hair was black and they wore full black beards, and all were as lean and supple as greyhounds. And like greyhounds, their chests were developed out of all proportions to the rest of their bodies, which were bony and gaunt.

So the workers toiled at their machines, and the shelks and mogs sat and watched, drowsily; and the mogs even dozed. For they knew well that no man would dare to raise his hand against their masters. Besides, the masters were armed with the terrible fire-hoses, curious weapons consisting of a small box which was strapped on each shelk's back, from which emerged a hose that ended in a long tube

thrust in a scabbard. Deadly weapons these were indeed, for they could throw a searing beam of heat that, even at a hundred yards, was fatal.

OF THE four younger toilers, the mightiest was Otaro. He had been a slave of the shelks but a few weeks. Before that he had been the chief of the Kraylings, a powerful tribe of pit dwellers who lived in a man-pit many miles from where he now toiled. Like all the Kraylings—indeed, like all the toilers in this room, who had once been Kraylings, too—he was black-skinned and woolly-haired. Unlike the others, however, the look of nobility on his face had not yet been erased by the knowledge of his servitude.

His mind was dwelling on the events of the past as he worked, and on the probabilities of the present. All of his life he had dwelled with the fear of the shelks upon him, for ever and anon, as long as the records of his tribe told of, the shelks had made periodic raids on his pit and carried off living prisoners to some unknown destiny. He and his people had always looked upon these raids as inevitable, and had come to accept them as part of the scheme of things. When it came Otaro's turn, there had been a fight. Yet the end was the same—when the battle was over, a living but unconscious Otaro had been picked up by the shelks and taken from his pit, to live and learn what the shelks required of living Krayling prisoners.

He was wondering now what might be going on back in the pit of the Kraylings. Had his brother Mutassa acceded to the chieftainship? If so, he might almost be content, for Mutassa would certainly make a great chief. But there was one Koudok—

Otaro gasped suddenly, his hand half raised to his mouth in an uncontrollable gesture of surprise. Then, instantly, a mask of immobility had swept across his face and he turned to face his machine again. But his heart was pounding, and ever and anon he stole a look, out of the corner of his eye, at the doorway high up at the top of the stairs.

For a man had appeared there, and Otaro had been looking straight at the doorway when he appeared. The man had withdrawn immediately, but not before Otaro had seen him plainly. Never had Otaro seen such a man—indeed, it was only in the oldest legends of his tribe that such a man had even been told of.

He was a *white* man, tall and well-built, clad in a loose-sleeved tunic with a wide-pocketed belt. Around his head was a simple gold band such as the governors of shelk cities wore, and in his hand was a fire-hose, the weapon of the shelks!

In the legends of the Kraylings were stories of the *miztas,* mighty men of old who had once battled with the shelks and ruled over the Kraylings. And legend said that the *miztas* had gone away, long ago, promising some day to return and set free the Kraylings from their fear of the savage beasts that ruled the Surface!

So Otaro the Krayling bent to his work, trembling a little, and stole glances out of the corner of his eye at the doorway above.

And presently the man appeared again, stooping, cautious, so that the shelks would not see him. He moved toward the steps. Behind him another man appeared. Otaro's heart skipped a beat, for this second man was a mog! And the mog stepped forward cautiously and spoke softly to the first man. Quite certainly these two were friends, but what could a *mizta,* a free man, have in common with a mog? Otaro had no time to answer this question, however, for just then a third man appeared, and *his* identity caused Otaro to lose all control of himself and to gasp audibly.

He hastily turned the gasp into a cough as one of the shelks raised his head, and

bent to his work more busily than ever. For several moments he dared not look up again; yet every fibre of his being shrieked with curiosity.

For the third man had been his brother Mutassa, whom he had believed to be back in the Krayling pit, ruling in his place!

THOUGHTS sped through Otaro's brain like the shadows of dancers about a fire. Who was this white man, so like the *miztas* of legend? Why was the mog seemingly his friend? What, above all, was Mutassa doing with them? And what—he stole a look at the stairs again—what were they about to do, as they stole silently down toward the shelks? Was it possible that they meant to attack them?

Yes, it must be that, for the foremost man, the *mizta,* had raised his fire-hose—

At just that moment one of the mogs raised his eyes. He saw the three, and, giving a startled yelp, flung himself at them. The fire-hose in the hand of the *mizta* spat flame and fury, and the mog, smoking and screeching, flung himself, dying, in front of the man.

The white one stumbled, almost fell, and to save himself, dropped his fire-hose nozzle and flung himself back. He was on his feet instantly, but before he could recover his hose, he saw that the shelks, aroused by the mog's cry, had leaped up and were raising their own hoses to burn the white one down.

And then Otaro saw a sight that in his wildest dreams he had never conceived. The *mizta* screamed, a disconcerting scream that seemed almost a madman's yelp of panic. Leaping from his place, some six steps from the bottom of the flight, he flung himself directly upon the shelks, legs kicking and arms flailing, a very embodiment of a whirlwind. The mog and Mutassa, who seemed a little uncertain what to do, waited but the slightest part of a second and then followed the white man's example. By this time the shelks' second mog had joined the fray, and Mutassa and the strange mog devoted their attention to him.

For the *mizta* was handling the two shelks alone, and a very good job he was making of it. With a god-like consistency, he had paid no attention to the shelks themselves when he landed among them. It was their fire-hoses that were dangerous and it was their fire-hoses to which he directed his attention. He grasped the nozzle of one even as he kicked viciously at the box on the back of the other. His foot missed the box, but landed on the jaw of the shelk who wore it, and as he wrenched the nozzle from the hose in the first shelk's hand, he flung himself at the other and crashed a foot into its face.

The second shelk, almost blinded by the vicious kick, staggered back and raised his fire-hose again. The white *mizta* abandoned his attack on the first shelk, whose weapon was now useless, and leaped at the other. In a moment, his weapon, too, was useless and the two shelks, unable to conceive a man who could be victorious in a battle with shelks, rushed in to the attack unarmed.

And then, unarmed as he was, the shelks learned what ensuing generations of their kind were to face from aroused and enfuriated mankind. With feet and hands and even teeth, the white man tore at them, ignoring claws and snapping fangs, gouging and tearing at their limbs until he literally tore them apart. One attempted at last to flee, but the strange *mizta* seized him by a dragging limb and pulled him back even as, with the other hand, he choked that shelk's companion into black insensibility.

THE whole room was in an uproar. The majority of the men, the old-looking ones and the more hopeless, were huddled at the far end of the room,

whimpering and wailing piteously. But some ten, the stronger ones, had pushed forward, and, although afraid to lend a hand, were watching the battle with fanatic eagerness. And when the strange mog and Mutassa, Otaro's brother, rose from slaying the mog assistant, they broke into involuntary cheers.

Otaro's brother raised a hand.

"A *mizta,* my comrades! A *mizta* come to rescue you! See how he has slain your savage masters? A *mizta,* truly, come to rescue you from the shelks."

Otaro hastened forward with him and Mutassa presented him to the white man.

"This is my brother Otaro, Lord," he said. "This is he of whom I told you—he who was lord of the Place before the shelks took him from us."

"And who is this great one, Mutassa?" he asked.

Mutassa was about to answer, but the white man motioned him to silence. He spoke himself.

"I am Tumithak," he said. "Tumithak of the far-off pits of Loor. Tumithak, the Lord of the Lower Corridors and Protector of the Tains!"

Standing there before them, his voice rose in volume and dropped in tone, and as he grew in excitement, the words fairly burst from his lips.

"Ten years ago, oh Kraylings, while I was still a child of fourteen, I lived, skulking like any other pitman, deep in the corridors of Loor. But one day I found a book that told of how once men were free, lords of all the Surface. It told of the coming of the shelks from another world, and of how men fought a losing battle with those savage beasts, and of how those men who still valued their freedom were forced at last to build the intricate pits and corridors which became their home.

"And when I learned from that book that men had once fought with shelks, I vowed that it should be so again. So, when I grew to be a man, I set forth from Loor, on the long journey up the corridors; for I was determined to seek the Surface and slay a shelk, to prove to my people that it might still be done.

"Many were my adventures by the way, but at last I reached the Surface and slew my shelk, bringing its head back to my people as I had vowed.

"Then my people made me their ruler, and greatly daring, I led them through

the Dark Corridors and the Halls where lived those fat cattle of the shelks, the Esthetts, until at last we burst onto the Surface and overwhelmed the shelk-town of Shawm. With the help of the Tains pitmen from another pit, I taught my people the way to operate the complicated weapons of the shelks, and so we were able to live in Shawm and defend that city."

"And with the help of the High One to whom the pitmen pray, I shall conquer more shelks, and more shelks, and *more shelks*—until the time comes when the last shelk, surrounded by his servile group of foul mogs, shall fall, stinking and burning, to his deserved death!"

CHAPTER TWO

Three Against the World

HIS voice, which had risen to almost a shout, ceased suddenly. His gesturing hands dropped to his side. His head was thrust back, his eyes to the ceiling. And even had they desired it, it would have been impossible to restrain the cheer that went up from those black ones who so short a time before had been hopeless slaves.

But even as they cheered there was one who detached himself from the still wailing group across the room and came forward hesitantly. He whispered something to one of the cheering black men that caused that one to cease his cheering and to look toward Tumithak uncertainly.

"One wonders, O *mizta*, what that foul mog does who follows you. Would a savior of men consort with a mog?"

The strange mog bristled, and a scowl spread across his face. He raised his arm in a threatening gesture and started to speak, but Tumithak silenced him for a moment.

"This mog," he said, "is *my* mog. Twice now, has he proved his loyalty to me. None who would be the friend of Tumithak can be the enemy of Kiletlok the Mog. But that you may know him to be loyal, I will tell you of how I met him."

Tumithak directed a look of half-affectionate pride at Kiletlok, and went on:

"In Shawn, the fallen shelk town where my people dwell, we power our weapons with the white and shining rods of power which only the shelks know the secret of making. When the men of the Lower Corridors seized Shawn, some two years ago, they seized many of those shining rods, and with them powered the machines that they seized.

"But as time passed, the power rods were gradually used up, and the time came when I saw it would be necessary to make a raid on some shelk town to secure more rods of power. So with seven men, I set out one day to seek another shelk town. And on the third day I beheld a group of shelks and mogs approaching in the distance, so, concealing my men, we ambushed the shelks and attacked them. Now fierce was the battle, for at its end all were dead save I and one mog. And then that mog flung himself on his knees before me and called me master. He was Kiletlok, and since then he has served me faithfully and well."

Kiletlok slapped his chest, and in his rumbling bass he growled assent.

"When a shelk slays another," he said, "the slain shelk's property goes to his murderer. Thrice in my life I have changed masters that way, and if the last time, my master was a man, should that change all the teachings that I have been taught? Nay. So I serve Tumithak and serve him loyally until he is slain by another."

This explanation seemed to satisfy practically all of the black men, and their looks of distrust disappeared.

"But what of you, my brother?" Otaro said. "How came you to be with these

great heroes? And what goes on back at home, in the pits of the Kraylings?"

Mutassa's face clouded for a moment.

"There were ill times at the Place, after you left, Lord of the Kraylings. Strife and confusion and rebellion—"

Otaro's eyes flashed.

"What mean you? Did Koudok—"

"Aye, Koudok!" Mutassa's eyes matched Otaro's as he told of the events that had followed the capture of Otaro by the shelks:

"Koudok must have planned long and well, even before ever the shelk raid that took you off. For many of the captains and doctors were on his side when he staged his coup. And though few of the people would have followed him, they were too afraid of the captains and the doctors to disobey. So I, who should have succeeded you to the chieftainship, was deposed and it was only through the kindness and sympathy of the common ones that I was able to conceal myself and avoid the slaughter that Koudok had planned for me."

Otaro swore angrily.

"If ever I again see the Place," he swore, "Koudok shall answer to me—"

"Wait," Mutassa interrupted. "I have not told you the half. For two weeks or more, I skulked in the Place, hiding now in this apartment, now in that, cringing in deserted corridors and abandoned pits, and eating only when some pitying Krayling shared his rations with me. But at last a patrol of searchers found me!"

HE PAUSED and glanced at Tumithak, who motioned him to continue.

"There were six of them and they all attacked me at once," Mutassa went on. "I tried to defend myself, but though I managed to avoid their swords, I knew it could be but a matter of time until they slew me, for I was so busy defending myself that I could not attack.

"At last I did manage to pierce one of the most careless, but the other five were pressing me entirely too closely—when suddenly I heard a cry from the upper part of the corridor, and a moment later, I found myself defended by two strange men!"

Tumithak interrupted him for a moment.

"Kiletlok and I had been wandering on our way to Kaymak, the city from which the mog came. A storm had overtaken us and we sought shelter in a cave. Before I had been there long, I realized that the cave was the entrance to a man-pit, and I determined to explore it and see if any men still lived there. We must have been several miles from the entrance when we came upon Mutassa attempting to defend himself from his enemies." He motioned to the Krayling to continue his story.

"Never have I seen such fighting as the *mizta* and his mog did," averred Mutassa. "The corridor was but dimly lighted, and for a minute or two, my enemies knew not whom they were fighting. Two of them fell before it dawned on them that the men who fought with them were other than common mortals. But when they saw that they fought with *white* men—Ah, you should have seen the remaining three flee! We pursued them, but they managed to elude us, so we stopped for awhile, and Tumithak told me who he was and I told him how I knew that he was a *mizta*.

"I told him of that long-forgotten day when men lived upon the Surface, and of how the *mistas* ruled over all. I told him of the coming of the shelks, and how the *mistas* withdrew from the Surface. I told him of how they made the Place for the black man, because of a legend that the white man had, that the black man must be kept in his Place. And I told of how the prophecy said that one day the *mistas* would return, to lead us again to the Surface, to conquer over the shelks.

"And he in turn told me of his life and of the great work to which he had dedicated himself. So then I knew him to be truly the great *mizta* of the prophecy, and to him I swore my fealty. And we went on into the Place."

"And Koudok?" interrupted Otaro.

"Patience a minute, brother. I have told you that the common people were all in favor of me. Can you not imagine what happened when I returned, bringing a *mizta* out of legend with me? The people defied their leaders and rose up against them. Koudok and his leaders defended themselves in one corridor for a bare two days. Then we captured them. They fought desperately, but their cause was hopeless. Koudok I slew with my bare hands."

Otaro breathed a sigh of relief. But not allowing this to interrupt him, Mutassa went on:

"When everything was at peace again, and the disturbers were slain, the people unanimously acclaimed me as chief. But I had sworn fealty to Tumithak, and he was leaving to continue his search for the rods of power. So I appointed lieutenants to rule for me in my absence and followed my lord in his quest."

The huge black man stole a look at Tumithak that was almost one of worship. Tumithak, seemingly a little impatient at the long synopsis, hastened to conclude the story.

"Kiletlok had told me that there were many power rods to be found in Kaymak," he said. "So toward Kaymak the three of us directed our footsteps. We entered the city at night, for at night all shelks sleep soundly. Kiletlok led us to a place where, he said, the power rods were stored. We found them, but alas, daybreak occurred before we could get out of the building. In seeking a hiding place, we found the entrance to this pit, in the building; and a long journey down the corridor led us to this room."

He paused and looked about him.

"Is there another way out of here, except the way we came down?"

Otaro shook his head. "I have been here for weeks, and I know that the shelks would not let us roam about this room with the freedom that we do if there were any chance of escaping. For well they know that an Arzan would gladly die rather than remain in this room."

"Arzan?" Tumithak caught at the unfamiliar word. "What is an Arzan, Otaro? And why die rather than remain in this room?"

"We workers are called Arzans by the shelks," answered the Krayling. "It is an ancient word, a man-word, I believe. And here in this room, far underground, we labor to produce the white and shining rods which are the power by which the shelks run their machines."

"You *make* the rods? *Here?*"

"Aye. That is why they store them in the building above."

"Now here is fortune indeed! But why die rather than remain in this room, Otaro? The work is none too hard, it seems."

Otaro smiled sadly. "The work is none too hard. And we are fed, and have comfortable quarters. But—" He turned and indicated a gray-haired, bent, old Krayling near him. "This, O *Mizta,* is Mitobi. He is twenty-nine years old, and has been in this room no longer than ten months."

TUMITHAK felt a thrill of horror shoot through him. "Is there poison in this room, then?"

Otaro nodded. "Poison, indeed! But not such poison as man ever heard of. It is a poison light, *mizta* Tumithak, that glows from the machines when we feed the iron powder into it to make the rods of power."

"The *iron?*"

"Yes, truly. For of iron are the white

and shining rods of power constructed."

Tumithak rose dizzily.

"And you have made these white and shining rods from iron?"

"Yes. For over three weeks."

"Know you how these machines work?"

"Why, yes. If one has a block of the metal called *hooramnon*,* it is not so hard to build a destabilizer, as these machines are called."

"Then—have each of these machines got blocks of *hooramnon* in them?"

"Certainly."

"Then tear them out! Conceal the *hooramnon* on your person. We must escape this pit and win back to Shawn or die in the attempt! Man needs this secret, Otaro. And Man needs *you!*"

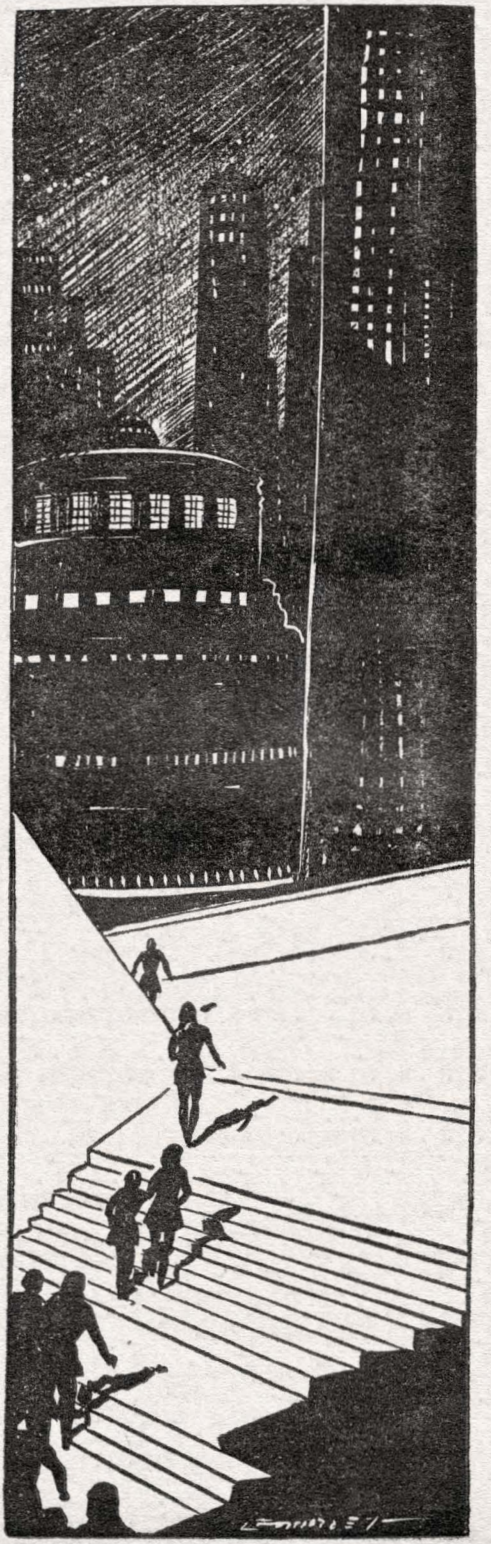
For the first time in many weeks, the dulled eyes of Otaro broke into a glow. He turned to the other Arzans and gave them hurried orders. They had listened to Tumithak and Otaro as they talked and now they, or at least the ones that were strong enough, leaped hurriedly to obey his orders. In a few moments, they came forward with half a dozen blocks of grayish metal in their hands.

WHILE they had been procuring the metal, Tumithak's mind had been racing madly, in an endeavor to devise a means of escape from the pit. Now he turned to Kiletlok.

"Do you know aught concerning these Arzans, Kiletlok?" he asked. "Do the shelks own them privately or are they servants of all? Do they remain always in one pit or are they sometimes transferred? Would they trust them to a mog or would they only trust them to a shelk? Tell me these things."

Kiletlok looked uncertain. Not knowing Tumithak's plan, he was unable to answer clearly. Tumithak saw his uncertainty.

*Uranium?



"Look, mog." he said. "If you were to emerge from this pit, leading a pack of Arzans, would it look suspicious?"

Light dawned on Kiletlok. A grin spread over his features.

"I think it could be done, Master," he stated. "I think it might work if no suspicious shelk passed our way. For the Arzans are owned by the government and are often transferred from one pit to another. And sometimes from one city to another. Perhaps, therefore, we might even get aboard a shelk flying machine and capture it."

"Good!" ejaculated Tumithak. "Thus will we escape, then, as a group of Arzans being taken from this pit. Kiletlok will lead us, and see that you wield your whip realistically, mog."

Mutassa spoke up.

"That is well for the rest of us, *mizta,*" he exclaimed. "But what of yourself? With that red hair and white skin, no shelk will believe for a moment that you are either Arzan or mog."

"Why then," said Tumithak, "my hair and skin must be changed."

He looked about the room. Surely, somewhere, he could find something that would darken his skin. Mutassa looked too, and presently the others took up the search. After a while, Otaro came forward with some grease from one of the machines, but upon trying it out, they were disappointed, for though it spread well, it changed Tumithak into nothing more than a rather dirty pitman. Then Otaro had a thought and, borrowing Tumithak's fire-hose, he stripped the clothes from the dead mogs, and in a moment had reduced them to sooty ashes. Mixing the soot with the grease, he soon transferred the Loorian into a fairly presentable Krayling.

"And now," said Tumithak, "who will volunteer to undertake this hazardous escape with us?"

He had forgotten the hopelessness of the Arzans' position. Every man volunteered at once and he was forced to reverse his position and ask for volunteers to stay. In the end, they asked him to appoint the ones who must remain, which he did, picking those who seemed to be the least affected by the rays. "For," he said, "I leave you here with hope. Before the days of your servitude can be ended by death, I promise to come back to this city and free you. By the High One whom we all worship, I swear to conquer this city or die, with my people, in the attempt."

And then he and his little party, armed with the secret that was to place men again on an equal footing with their savage enemies, started up the stairs.

CHAPTER THREE

Flight from Kaymak

WHEN they reached the door and Kiletlok's hand was on the knob, the mog turned and motioned the other to silence.

"We are about to leave this place of comparative safety," he whispered softly to the group. "We are about to go out among the creatures who are the enemies of all of us. It is only by acting in such a way that we do not arouse suspicion that we may hope to win to greater safety. The actions of those whom we rescued from the corridor I do not worry about.

"But master—" he paused and turned to Tumithak, almost pleading—"if ever you have acted as a slave, act as one now. I know well your hatred of the shelks and your bravery, but this is no time to display either of them. Remember this as you value your life—while you are in Kaymak, you are less than the lowest slave. Indeed, you are but an animal."

He turned without saying more, flung the door open, and the group stepped out into the open. Kiletlok took his whip from his belt, and with a snarl that was

typically mog-like, laid it across the back of the nearest Arzan. They set off through the maze of shelk towers in the direction indicated by the mog.

The way through the streetless city was absolutely incomprehensible to Tumithak. He realized that Kiletlok evidently recognized some of the landmarks, but to the Loorian all the clustered towers looked alike and the way through them seemed endless.

And the shelks! They were clustered in the streets by the thousands. Tumithak soon realized that the safety of his group lay in the very number of his enemies. In a city so large and busy as this one, there was little time or desire on the part of the citizens to question anything a bit unusual.

Several of the shelks did look curiously at the group, but they paid more attention to Kiletlok, it seemed, than they did to Tumithak or the Arzans. And what mogs they saw drowsed sleepily in front of their masters' towers or slouched aimlessly along, bent on some idle journey or other, paying no attention whatever to the group. One, indeed, did direct a casual question to Kiletlok, but the mog answered him curtly and he wandered off.

And so, after a couple of hours' walking, they drew near to the eastern end of the city. And here, for the first time, they met with disaster.

For a shelk approached them, at a point where the neighborhood was compartively deserted. It was about to pass them when it suddenly halted and looked them over curiously. Tumithak saw its eyebrows raise in a peculiarly human sign of interest, and then it called sharply to Kiletlok. The latter answered immediately by saluting, dropping his whip to the ground and bending over on both knees to pick it up again. The shelk spoke.

What do you with Arzans on the Surface, mog?" it clacked. "Is this not forbidden?"

Kiletlok looked up, answered boldly.

"These Arzans go to Chutlak," he said. "My master, Ket-l-ket the trader, sent me all the way from that town to bring them to him. He plans a power factory in that town."

The shelk's eyes narrowed to the tiniest slits.

"I fear your master trusts his mog too much," it sneered. "Did he remain in Chutlak?"

"Yes, sir," answered Kiletlok, a little weakly, and Tumithak noticed the faintest pallor beginning to touch his cheek.

"You have your order with you, I suppose," pursued the shelk. Kiletlok shook his head.

"It was taken from me when I was given charge of the Arzans," he said stolidly.

The shelk gave forth a clucking noise, but whether it was expressing doubt or annoyance or some other emotion, Tumithak could not say. Then suddenly it smiled, a tight-lipped, dubious smile.

"Take your men to the tower of Chukhoka-klekht, at once," it said. "You must have an order before you leave the city."

Kiletlok saluted again, and the shelk crawled off. Tumithak gave a sigh of relief. But the mog shook his head.

"That one is definitely suspicious. Even now he is probably on his way to report his meeting with us to some one in authority. It is a race against time, now."

HE TURNED and led the way, at a dog-trot, through the maze of towers. It was a severe pace he set, for Kiletlok was a mog, and what was to him an easy, jaunting gait was a strain indeed to the Arzans, and told to some extent even on the powerful Mutassa and the Loorian. But the entire group bore the pace without complaint, their minds on their ultimate goal, and even more on the danger behind them. And at last, the

towers ended and they found themselves standing on a broad expanse at the east side of the city.

Some distance away, a group of shelk-flyers bore witness to the fact that the broad expanse was a flying field. There were fewer than a half-dozen shelks scattered across the entire expanse and Tumithak blessed the vagrant fates. There was still a chance to escape if—They advanced boldly out onto the field and in the direction of the largest of the flying machines. They were halfway to it when a clattering screech sounded behind them. Kiletlok paled and gave a queer whining cry of despair.

"They've found out!" he moaned. "We just missed making it."

He slowed down his pace as he spoke and Tumithak realized that the leadership of the band had once more been placed on his shoulders. He reached into his garment and drew out his hidden fire-hose. And Mutassa, seeing this, grimly bared his sword and took his place at Tumithak's side.

"Make for that flyer as quickly as possible," ordered Tumithak.

The group of Arzans needed no second bidding. Already, behind them, they could see the group of pursuing shelks unlimbering their fire-hoses and starting off across the field. One enthusiastic shelk sent a beam from its weapon across the field toward them, but the distance was too great to cause more than discomfort to the group and to spur them to greater effort to avoid the blasting heat that would be their portion if the shelks cut down the distance between them.

They were near the flyer now, and the group of shelks which had gathered under it milled about uncertainly. These shelks were unarmed, but were gathered around the door of the big cabin in various attitudes of pugnacity.

Tumithak saw that these creatures failed to realize their danger. He paused for the smallest fraction of a second, directed a blast from his fire-hose into the group and then continued running toward them. There was a squawk as the most exposed shelk felt the beam, and the entire group scrambled away from the door, suddenly intent on finding a shelter from the deadly ray.

For a moment, it looked as if the little band of humans would manage to take the flyer without further trouble. The shelks that were pursuing them across the field were still too far away to be a danger; the shelks around the flyer had scattered in panic before the incredible sight of an armed *man,* and the way to the door of the flyer was clear. The little group was no more than thirty feet from the door when an armed shelk suddenly appeared in the doorway!

TUMITHAK gave a cry of warning and instinctively threw himself upon the ground. It was well for him that he did so, but for the Arzans following him it was not so good. Tumithak's warning cry was a command for them to follow his example, but their reactions were too slow. The Loorian heard sudden cries of anguish and knew that some of his companions had been seared by the beam. Even as he pressed the lever that released his own beam, he realized that he was not a moment too soon.

Mutassa, at his right side, yelled a hoarse warning, and Tumithak felt a sharp bite at the right side of his head and smelled suddenly the peculiar odor of burning hair. But his own beam had caught the shelk full in the face, and the creature dropped its weapon before its heat could do any real damage.

Tumithak leaped to his feet and raced toward the flyer, calling to his companions to follow him. Had he stopped to look back he would have been dismayed at the damage the shelk had accomplished. Fully

five of the Arzans were injured too badly to follow the Loorian; several, indeed, were probably dead. But here was no time for false heroics. The human race set a greater store by live cowards than by dead heroes in those critical days. Regretfully, but without so much as a backward look, Tumithak ran to the shelk-flyer and boarded it.

THEY flew a good many miles before they saw any signs of pursuit. It was Mutassa, who had been glancing back anxiously every once in a while, who saw them first. They were but little dots above the horizon, but there was no doubt that they were the dreaded flying police.

"They come, Tumithak," he said softly. "Four of them, I think."

Tumithak glanced back through the rear window and grinned bleakly.

"They do draw near, indeed," he said. "But we—we draw near to Shawm. And when those shelk-flyers reach Shawm, they will find that man can be more than a match for such crawling beasts as they. There are disintegrators at Shawm. And they have orders to destroy every shelk-flyer that appears near the sacred city."

Kiletlok's eyes widened.

"Master!" he ejaculated. "Have you forgotten that *we* ride a shelk-flyer?"

With a cry that might have been an oath, Tumithak whirled about to the controls and threw the machine into a deep dive. He straightened it out into a zooming sweep, his face set and white. He saw an open place in the woodland where he might land the flyer. A few moments later, the entire group piled out of the machine and looked wildly about to see if the enemy were within striking distance.

They were. Not much more than a quarter of a mile away, four shelk-flyers drew swiftly near. There seemed to be little hope for the grounded men, yet Tumithak, now that he had reached the ground, seemed curiously unworried. And the Arzans were soon to see why.

For suddenly the foremost flyer disappeared incontinently, with a sharp report. The suddenness of it made them all gasp, and one can only imagine the effect it had on the shelks in the flyers that were following. One moment the flyer was there—the next it was gone! And then that sharp report like a clap of thunder.

The other three flyers checked their flight hastily. Indeed the first went into a sudden loop to avoid reaching the spot where the leader had met its face. But their tactics were in vain. First one and then another vanished; presently, almost before the watchers on the ground realized it, their enemies had been reduced to the primal atoms from which they had been composed. And for the first time in many a day, Tumithak heaved a genuine sigh of relief.

"Come, now," he said. "We are safe at last. Let us go on our way to Shawm. I have no doubt we will find a party seeking us."

He strode off through the trees to the north, the others following, and sure enough, before long they ran across a band of warriors who had fared forth from Shawm to attack the supposed shelks in the grounded flyer. When they found that instead of the shelks, they had come across their chief, their joy knew no bounds.

And so, amid shouts and singing and laughter, Tumithak came again into his own city.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Great Weapon

THE days after the arrival of Tumithak at Shawm were busy indeed. The priests of the Tains, and especially old Zar-Emo, the high priest, welcomed Otaro with open arms and eagerly studied the secrets of the Arzans, aiding them to build the machines from which the white and shining rods might be made from iron. Hardly a week passed before the first machine was completed, and its precious block of *hooramnon* installed in it. They carefully avoided setting up the machine in the village, fitting up a cavern about a mile from the town to be used as the factory.

There was some dispute about who would operate the dangerous machines, for the Arzans certainly had had enough of them, and none of the men of Shawm cared to shorten their lives by becoming the operators. But Zar-Emo pointed out that short exposures to the rays did little permanent harm, and so it was arranged that each man in the village should take his turn at it, thus forcing no man to act as operator oftener than once or twice a year. This, the high priest felt sure, would cause little inconvenience and practically no danger.

Within a bare three weeks, Zar-Emo and Otaro had managed to start the actual production of the power rods. Proud indeed were the two, when they brought to Tumithak the first bar manufactured. It was decided to hold a ceremony, to make a holiday to celebrate what seemed to be their release from the last possibility of dependence on the shelks. Now, with the Tains' ability to produce and multiply the weapons of their wise ancestors and this new ability to manufacture the power that ran them, men began to feel a freedom that they had not known for thousands of years.

The holiday was a great success. All over Shawm, and down in the pits where many of the people of Tumithak still lived, the folk celebrated with feasting and speeches. The speeches were nothing new; the pit dwellers, for centuries, had had little or no means of celebrating other than to boast or make speeches about their successes, but the feasting was a novelty, a novelty that was growing greater every day.

When the people of Tumithak had come in contact with the Tains, they had learned for the first time that the synthetic food-cubes which they manufactured might have taste. And now Kiletlok had come among them, showing them that the very plants and animals which were so common on the surface might be pre-

pared to be used as food and be made to reveal tastes so delightful that even the Tains were filled with gratified wonder.

Old Zar-Emo outdid himself at the speech-making in Tumithak's banquet hall. Indeed, so enthusiastic did he become that his speech outshone and outlasted even the speeches of those leather-lunged orators, Tumithak and Nennapuss of Nonone. And for once, even those masters made no attempt to outspeak him, for they were as interested in what he had to say as he was in saying it.

"The availability of large quantities of power rods," he said, "has given us the use of several new machines. And the knowledge of how the rods are made has taught us several things about the marvelous way in which the High One constructed the matter which composes the earth in which we live. Indeed, we have learned so much that Otaro and I feel safe in announcing that soon we may be able to greatly improve the weapons which we now have. Perhaps in a few weeks we may be able to construct fire-hoses and disintegrators with ranges far larger than those we have today.

"I do not want to raise your hopes too high, but it seems that there are things about this matter that may enable us to produce weapons such as we—and perhaps even the shelks themselves—are now totally ignorant of."

After the banquet, Tumithak questioned Zar-Emo further about this statement, but the priest was very vague. Too little had been done in the way of experiment for him to be able to tell very much of his hopes.

HAD old Zar-Emo but known it, he was dealing with forces far beyond the poor knowledge which he and Otaro possessed. Indeed, the shelks themselves, because of its danger, had long avoided research along the very line that the priest was now pursuing. But the old Tain knew nothing of that, and in the little laboratory in the cavern beyond the town, he and Otaro pursued their investigations. Until one day—

Tumithak stood outside the fallen shelk tower that he had fitted up as his home, discussing probable campaigns against Kaymak with Kiletlok, and his lieutenant, Datto of Yakra. Suddenly Datto pointed behind Tumithak and barked a wordless ejaculation of surprise. Tumithak whirled and saw, far beyond the town, a mighty white column of smoke shooting up into the air. No sooner did he spy it than a crash like all the thunderclaps of history struck him with almost physical force. He staggered and threw up his hands to cover his ears, and then, from the direction of the power bar factory, came a blast of wind that truly did hurl him and his companions from their feet and send them rolling along the ground for a dozen yards.

Tumithak fetched up against a fallen shelk tower. He had not lost consciousness, but he was dazed and badly shaken.

First and foremost, he was aware of a howling, shrieking, whistling wind. And there were frequent cracking and crashing and screeching sounds, like breaking branches and falling trees, and the groaning of girders in the shelk towers, strained to their utmost. He heard a woman's shrill scream, and the gabble of a man's shouted question, cut short before it was finished. And then more crashes, and above them all the raging of the wind.

He shielded his eyes from the buffeting of the gale and tried to look around. The wind eddied about his fingers and filled his eyes with dust. He rubbed them with his knuckles and swore; and from somewhere, not far away, came a panic-stricken scream, the scream that had sent his forefathers scampering into the maze of unoccupied corridors—the scream of "Shelk!"

Could Tumithak have seen about him,

could he have made against that wind, it is likely that he would have done what many others of his people did and fled to the corridors. But he was temporarily blinded, so he remained cowering where he was, crouching against the tower, and after a few minutes, to his surprise, the wind suddenly died down and, weakly, the sun shone through the pall of settling dust.

TUMITHAK rose to his feet, blinking. He heard a man groan and saw him, lying in a corner between two buildings. He moved forward with the vague idea of somehow helping the fellow, and turned as Kiletlok hastened up to him. The mog seemed unhurt—indeed, he seemed quite in control of himself. He sighed with relief as he realized that Tumithak was comparatively unharmed, too.

"Was it a shelk attack?" asked Tumithak, still a little dazed. "Was it—"

Kiletlok shook his head.

"It came from the direction of the power bar factory," he stated. "I do not know what it was, but I *think*—" he paused. "I think that Zar-Emo has learned more than he hoped about the making of matter."

"Zar-Emo!"

The name burst forth from Tumithak's lips in something like panic. Though still shaken, he hurried off through the town in the direction of the power bar factory, followed by the mog. They found Datto not far away, cursing over an injured wrist, and he joined them, and the three hurried through the town, followed by an increasing band of pitmen.

As they drew near to the power bar factory, it became obvious that Kiletlok's surmise had been correct. The increasing signs of damage showed that the plant was the center of the explosion. But words fail utterly to describe the scene that met their eyes when they finally came within sight of the former location of the cavern. For over a quarter of a mile around it, not a tree remained standing. And where the cave had been, there was a crater, a crater that was hundreds of yards across and a full hundred yards deep!

It took but a second glance to convince the crowd that there was little use in searching for survivors among the ruins. Plainly, there were no survivors—indeed, there were not even ruins.

The silent little group of men started solemnly back to Shawm. Not one but realized that the explosion had been a heavy blow to their hopes. The day before, they had looked confidently forward to the time when they would have sufficient power to attack another shelk town, perhaps even Kaymak, itself. But now—now they were no better off than they had been when Tumithak had set out to find more power bars and had found instead, Kiletlok, Mutassa and the Arzans. The progress of man in his battle with the shelks seemed to have been halted—for how long, no man dared to say.

They had almost reached the outskirts of the stricken town when Tumithak heard a cry of excitement from some of the men on the left of the group. He turned, with the others, and saw several Loorians gesticulating eagerly.

"A man, Tumithak!" one of them cried. "A man in that tree! Hurled there by the explosion. One of those who worked in the factory, I think."

"It is Gastofac!" volunteered another. "Gastofac, the priest. He whom Zar-Emo was training to be his successor."

Tumithak took charge at once and superintended the removal of the body from the tree. To his surprise, when they got him down to the ground, they found that the man was alive. And they were still more surprised when he regained consciousness on the way back to the town.

The man was suffering from extreme

nervous shock, and it was all of a week before the doctors would allow him to be questioned. Then Tumithak visited his home and deluged him with questions.

"IT WAS, of course, the investigations of Zar-Emo and Otaro that brought about the explosion," said Gastofac. "They thought they saw a way to increase the release of power from the power rods. If they could control this, they might build disintegrators and fire-hoses with greater ranges than those of the shelks. This morning, they called me into the laboratory to show me their latest discovery.

"They had made a small machine, powered only with a small piece of power rod. Somehow—it is hard to explain, because there are no words in our language that can describe it—somehow, the power was turned into a sort of invisible fluid that flows in a wire. This fluid, which ordinarily could not flow in the air, was changed somehow into a beam that was projected into the air like a beam from a fire-hose."

Gastofac paused, took a drink of water and rested for a moment. He went on:

"There were graduates on the machine to vary the intensity and the length of the—'waves', Otaro called them. And when these graduates were set just so, the power in the power rods was given off faster. The speed could be regulated by the settings on the graduates. I saw Zar-Emo direct the beam from the machine on a little piece of power rod no bigger than my finger nail. It glowed and burned furiously and gave off enough heat to warm the entire cavern."

"But—the explosion," interrupted Tumithak. "That is what I want to find out about."

Gastofac gave a petulant exclamation.

"Wait a minute," he snapped. The man's nerves were badly frayed. "I'll be telling you about it in a minute."

He settled himself into a more comfortable position in his bed and went on:

"The morning of the explosion, Otaro had spent two or three hours explaining the whole process to me. Then they decided that it would be best to explain it to you, too. 'For,' said Zar-Emo, 'we are about to begin a very dangerous experiment, suggested by our recent success. And if we fail in it, there must be others to carry on our experiment where we left off'. So I was about to start off to get you when Otaro halted me.

" 'It is also well,' he said, quietly, 'to acquaint you with our intended experiment. If we should fail, perhaps you will succeed.' So they told me of their intentions and then sent me off after you. Apparently, after I had gone, they decided to continue with their work—and apparently their fears were only too well realized. Somehow or other, they accomplished the release of all the power in the power bars at once."

Tumithak rose to his feet in awe.

"You mean—all the power bars that we had stored in the factory went off at once?"

"Nothing else."

"And it was caused by a beam of force, of some sort, from a machine?"

Gastofac nodded.

"But if power bars can do this—"

Tumithak was dumbfounded. He was thinking of how, for years, he had carried a fire-hose on his back—a fire-hose that at any moment might have exploded and torn him limb from limb, had only the right force been directed upon it. He wondered how the shelks ever found them useful weapons.

And then he remembered the battle of Shawm, and how they had used the fire-hoses against the shelks without any opposition of that kind from the shelks. Was it possible that the shelks did not know of this power of releasing all the force in the power rods at once? And suddenly

it dawned on him that this must be so.

He stood stunned by the magnitude of the thing. A vision of Kaymak swept before his mind's eye—of Kaymak, city of a hundred thousand towers, and in every tower, no doubt, a power rod performing some useful purpose. And then he saw a fleet of flyers sweeping over the city, and beams of force lancing down from them—

"Gastofac!" he barked. "We have work to do. Mighty work. It is for us to give men a weapon—a real weapon, this time, that will make us the masters for all time!"

CHAPTER FIVE

City of Fear

DURING the next few weeks, Tumithak's enthusiasm rose to white heat. As each new detail came into his mind or was suggested by one of his lieutenants, victory seemed more certain. Of the four *hooramnon* cubes which they had brought from Kaymak, two had been lost in the fire and now but two remained. But with these they built up two more machines for producing power rods, and, several miles from the new factory, Gastofac set up a laboratory where he attempted to duplicate the explosion that had killed Otaro and Zar-Emo. But he worked with *small* pieces of material.

And while he worked, others worked, too. Many of the Tains were taught by their priests and the remaining Arzans how to manufacture the power rods. And hundreds of fire-hoses were constructed too, and men returning from the factories at night often spent long hours after supper making themselves proficient in their use.

It was long before the Krayling could convince Tumithak that there was any advantage in organized soldiering.

But after long arguments, Tumithak began to see the sense in an organization that kept the captains informed at all times of their armies' doings, and so military discipline was impressed upon and reluctantly accepted by the pitmen.

And then came drills and sham battles and fire-hose practice, and a sort of manual of arms developed, until, some months after the explosion, there came into being, in that little village of Shawm, the first army that Man had owned in a good eighteen hundred years.

While the army drilled and trained and gradually took form as a real unit, men worked and studied the intricacies of flying. There were three of these machines in the possession of the pitmen, one which had been captured in the fall of Shawm, one which had been salvaged from a short battle a year before, and the wreck, now carefully repaired, which had brought Tumithak and his companions from Kaymak.

These three machines were continually making short experimental flights designed to teach the pitmen the advantages and the limitations of flying, and, strangely enough, it was burly Datto of Yakra and the Shelk-Slayer, himself, who were the most interested and most expert of the newly created group of aviators. And they learned much, as the days went by, until they were able to fly the machines as well as any shelk. But by that time there were only two machines The other was lost in the river that flowed not far from Shawm, as were the bodies of the two promising young Tains who had been flying it at the time.

Twice during those months, Kiletlok, who also had come to know quite a bit about aviation, dared to take one of the machines on scouting expeditions to the very outskirts of Kaymak itself. Actually there was little danger. No shelk in his wildest imaginings would have dreamed that a mog would dare to manipulate a

stolen flying machine, and that he would do it on the very outskirts of the city was utterly incredible.

So Kiletlok made his flights in safety and learned much of value concerning the road to Kaymak and the best vantage points from which to operate.

AND thus at last came the day when the march on Kaymak began. It did not begin with a parade. No troops marched bravely into the wilderness with bands playing and banners waving. Indeed, no troops seemed to march at all. But a hundred pitmen melted into the forest, scattered, and began a hundred solitary marches toward an appointed meeting place.

And the next day a hundred others followed. And the next day, another hundred.

So gradually, Tumithak's entire army drifted slowly through the woods toward the shelk-city. But behind, in Shawm, Tumithak and certain of his lieutenants remained. Day after day, the women and children of the town saw their husbands and fathers leaving to fight the shelks, and still Tumithak, with Mutassa, Kiletlok, Datto and others, waited in the fallen shelk-towers of Shawm.

And then at last, when people had begun to wonder, and to mutter among themselves that perhaps Tumithak, himself, was none too certain of living if he attacked Kaymak, the two fliers rose one day and set off into the south. In the smaller of the two flew Datto, with his big nephew, Thopf, and Gastofac, the high priest of the Tains. In the other flew Tumithak and Kiletlok and Mutassa.

Tumithak made no attempt to suppress the excitement that he felt. And as mile after mile was put beneath them, his suspense grew greater and greater, not untinged with a little fear.

At last, afar off, they saw the towers of Kaymak. Kiletlok pointed them out to the Loorian, silent with awe at the stupendous importance of the moment. Tumithak nodded gravely, himself impressed into silence. But Mutassa spoke.

"If our plans have not gone astray, *mizta,* our army is waiting somewhere below us.

Tumithak nodded. "They await, well enough. And somewhere, off to the east, Datto and Gastofac await our signal to attack."

"Then—"

"Yes, we are ready. Take the controls, Kiletlok."

The mog eagerly slid into the seat vacated by Tumithak, and the Loorian turned to the strange machine that had been fitted up in the seat beside him. He flipped a couple of the strange switches, still made in careful imitation of the switches of the shelks, drew down a depressor of the sort that took the place of dials, and lowered the barrel of a strange machine-gun-like object that projected out of the window.

Far below was a single isolated farmhouse, a shelk-tower that was one of the first outposts of the distant city. Tumithak directed the barrel of his weapon upon it, pressed the slide and waited, breathless, upon the result. In spite of the many tests that the machine had had, there was still an element of uncertainty, for, after all, the pit-men had no certain means of knowing whether the shelks had a protection against this weapon or not. Perhaps all their planning had been in vain, perhaps—

The sides of the shelk-tower bulged outward. The tower split at the corners, from the bottom to halfway up. Dust poured out; the top rocked crazily.

Then the sound of the explosion reached them, a great, crackling roar like a clap of thunder combined with the shattering of a dozen great trees. The corners split the rest of the way up and the top began to lean. The tower fell with a crashing

clang, and smoke and flame poured from the ruin. The wrecked building passed beneath them, and as Mutassa leaned out of the side window and looked back he saw a shelk crawl painfully from the mass of wreckage and drag itself away.

Tumithak's eyes were glowing.

"Faster, Kiletlok!" he ordered. "If we can do that here, let us waste no time in getting to the center of the city."

A moment later, Tumithak's keen eyes spied another shelk tower. Again he aimed his tube and again he had the satisfaction of seeing the tower leap into the air and spread itself out. But this time no injured shelk crawled from the ruin, and Tumithak smiled grimly.

Another tower appeared—and disappeared the next moment. And then another. Then, far to the west of them, a column of dust rose in the air, and Mutassa pointed it out to the Loorian. Tumithak nodded with a satisfied air.

"Datto has found that his weapon is satisfactory, too," he said. "We will be busy from now on."

Indeed his words were painfully true. In less than a minute he blasted another shelk-tower and found it necessary to order Kiletlok to swing in a circle so that he might attack another that they had almost passed. And then he found it necessary to swing quickly on another.

THEY were over the outlying suburbs of the city now. It could be but a matter of time before the city knew of their raid. It was Tumithak's desire to do as much damage as possible before the shelks realized what was happening. Straight for the city's center they flew, and behind them they left a wide swathe of ruin.

The continual concussions of sound from beneath almost deafened them. Once the air pressure from a particularly violent explosion caused the flyer to rock crazily, and it was all the mog could do to get the vessel under control again. And when he did, a new danger confronted them. Speeding toward them from the left, plainly visible a couple of miles away, came a good dozen shelk-flyers!

Tumithak swung his instrument about and ordered Kiletlok to turn toward the shelks. His haste was inspired by the realization that he was woefully ignorant of all the weapons of the shelks, and the knowledge that it was necessary to get in the first blow; for if they let the shelks get close enough to attack with some unknown weapon, there could be little hope for the thousands that now filled the forests to the north of Kaymak. So it was essential that he conquer those shelks before they even realized that they were in the fight.

They flew on, and Tumithak held his weapon directly on the foremost flyer, held his slide depressed, and swore mightily under his breath because nothing happened. Would they never come within range?

Or *were* they already in range, and protected against the wave beam?

That possibility almost caused him to faint with fear. Almost instantly, he was the Tumithak that had crawled fearfully up the corridor, years before. All the boldness, all the belief in his high destiny began to ooze out of his conscious mind. And then, just as his parched lips moved to form the words that would bid Kiletlok flee, the foremost shelk-flyer exploded—almost, it seemed, in his very face. Actually, it was still nearly a mile away, but to Tumithak's wrought up emotions, it seemed near indeed.

Hardly daring to hope, Tumithak directed his weapon on the next shelk-ship, and it exploded. Incredibly, one after another, they all burst into flames and dust; after a few minutes, the air was clear of them and the Loorian again directed his weapon to the ground.

By now, the ship was over the most thickly populated portion of the city. The

shelks were aware that something unprecedented was happening. Kiletlok was swinging the machine in huge circles, and Tumithak was sweeping his weapon in wide swathes to take in as much of the city as possible. And away off on the western horizon, a long trail of smoke showed where Datto emulated Tumithak's example.

Mutassa uttered an excited ejaculation.

"Look below," he cried. "There is the factory where they manufacture the white and shining rods. There is the place where they imprisoned Otaro and forced him into degrading slavery! Strike there, *Mizta!* Strike there and avenge the thousands of Kraylings that have died in slavery."

FOR a moment or two, Tumithak hesitated to follow Mutassa's suggestion. He knew that by exploding the factory, more damage might be done than in any other way, but he was thinking of the possibility that there might still be Arzans in the pit far below who could be killed if he blew up the storage building on the surface. But a moment's reflection made him realize that the Arzan's prison was almost certainly too far below to be damaged, and it would be no difficult thing, providing Tumithak won this battle, to dig them out with disintegrating machines. And so he set his instruments and depressed the slide—

The factory disappeared in a cloud of dust. Almost instantly, it seemed. The cloud spread rapidly over the ground. It billowed up—and as the first sound of the explosion reached the flyer, it seemed as if the whole end of the city suddenly rose toward them. A blast of air, upward rushing, struck their vessel—and suddenly Tumithak knew what was going to happen.

"Quick, Kiletlok," he cried. "Up and away!"

But avoiding the consequences of his rash act was about as easy as avoiding the beam of a fire-hose would have been. The concussion from the explosion hit the flyer before the words were out of his mouth. The plane swept upward, indeed, but upward and backward, and it was not of Kiletlok's doing. In the grip of the mighty uprush of wind, the ship was as helpless as a leaf in a December gale. It was tossed higher and higher—and then it was falling, twisting and turning, and its three occupants were grasping wildly to find something to hold on to.

Kiletlok had been tossed from his seat and was making vain efforts to find his way back to it. Mutassa was lying in a corner with a dazed look on his face, while Tumithak, the only one who retained his original place, was clinging with both hands to a stanchion to keep from joining his two companions on the floor of the cabin.

Through the window, Tumithak could see the earth below, and it seemed to be rocking like a ship in the wildest of storms. Once the entire flyer turned over completely, and to the three it seemed as though the world swept up and over them and back again in a cosmic somersault. And all the while, the ground grew closer and closer and *closer.*

Tumithak, looking out the forward window, saw the ground sweeping crazily toward him. The horizon suddenly leveled off and he realized that they were about to crash. And then there was a grinding, wrenching, tearing sound as the flyer struck the surface—*on its wheels*—and skidded along the ground to a groaning stop!

At the very last moment, the flyer had righted itself, just in time to strike the ground safely.

To be sure, it was but comparative safety; Tumithak was wrenched from his grip on the stanchion, and his head struck smartly against the window, but though this dazed him and raised a lump that re-

mained for a week, it did no further damage. Kiletlok and Mutassa, although badly battered, were able to stagger to their feet.

THE scene about them was indescribable. They were on a tumbled, rock-strewn, distorted terrain where hardly a thing suggested that a few minutes before there had been a city. Smoke poured from cracks and crevices in the rock about them, and only here and there could be seen twisted metal sheets and fragments of girders that indicated that once a shelk city had reared proud towers to the sky. Through the gloom caused by the dust and smoke, the sun shone feebly.

The three stood uncertainly awhile and then started off in the direction that seemed most likely to be the north. They knew that northward, back in the direction from which they had come, the army awaited its moment to attack the disorganized and panic-stricken shelks.

They made little progress. They must have climbed over a half a hundred tumbled hummocks of rock without seeing the slightest change in scenery. They must have traversed at least a mile and a half, and still all about them was smoking ruin.

At last, scrambling over a huge ridge of ruins, they ran almost face to face with a party of shelks who were fleeing the city. Doubtless the creatures had not the slightest inkling of what had caused the terrible holocaust, but the sight of the three strange companions—pitman, Krayling and mog—traversing this vast scene of wreckage, linked somehow in their minds with the destruction of their city, and though they were unarmed, they attacked at once, armed only with the confidence that was born of two thousand years of shelk domination over man.

Curiously, at that fateful moment, Tumithak was confident, confident of his high destiny. Surely the High One whom the pitmen worshipped would never have brought him so far through the battle to let him die now. And in an unarmed battle, a man was more than a match for several shelks. He stood his ground, in spite of the fact that there were eight or nine shelks in the party.

As he strode forward boldly, he was quite sure that Kiletlok and Mutassa were behind him, and it was not until Kiletlok's cry of "Flee, master!" came to him from a dozen yards away, that he realized that the other two had not remained with him. And by that time it was too late.

HE TURNED part way, and saw Mutassa and Kiletlok fleeing. He turned back, and saw the shelks sweeping down on him. And he stood his ground, still outwardly confident, but inwardly wondering just a little what method the High One would use to rescue him from this predicament.

The shelks' method of fighting was peculiar. For countless generations the creatures had done all their fighting with the highly developed scientific weapons that they had brought from Venus or appropriated from the humans of the Golden Age. All idea of hand to hand conflict had been forgotten by them generations ago. So there was no subtlety, but only savagery in the first creature's onslaught. It sprang high into the air when it was close enough to Tumithak and fell upon him, all ten of its limbs swiping wildly, like the arms of a woman learning to box.

Tumithak could think of no better defense than that which he had used in the pit of the Arzans. He grasped one of the shelk's limbs and jerked the creature to him, he seized another and gave a wrenching, twisting motion and the shelk screamed in agony. Before the thing could recover from the pain of the attack, Tumithak launched a fist full in its face. Then three of the creature's limbs managed to struggle up between Tumithak's body and its own, and using them for leverage, the

injured creature pushed itself away from the pitman's dangerous embrace.

By this time, however, three more shelks had managed to reach the struggling pair. They attacked at once. Tumithak realized that he was about to be overcome by sheer force of numbers. He would not be conquered by the creatures so much as veritably buried beneath them.

So quick had been the shelks' attack that even yet the mog was not a hundred yards away. He heard and hesitated; so great was his ingrained fear for his savage ex-masters the mogs, that he continued running for several seconds. Then he slowed his pace. After a second, he began to run back toward the scene of the battle. Mutassa, seeing him turn, slowed down and turned about too.

They saw Tumithak struggling feebly beneath a mass of shelks. The maze of shelk legs made it seem that their numbers were greater than they really were, and Tumithak's chances seemed hopeless. Almost as one, the two slowed down their pace again. They were about to flee once more when they heard Tumithak call a second time. They looked at each other sheepishly, and then Kiletlok, as if apoligizing to Mutassa, murmured, "He is my master!" and sped toward the scene of battle. He had not taken a dozen steps before he heard Mutassa's steps behind him, and the voice of the Krayling saying, "And mine, Kiletok, and mine!"

It was not a moment too soon as far as Tumithak was concerned. He had managed to keep the shelk's teeth from his throat, but in so doing he had gotten his wrist between the shelk's head and his throat, and the shelk, bearing down on his arm, had forced his wrist into his throat, cutting off his wind and effectually choking him. Things were spinning around him, and he had almost lost consciousness when Kiletlok pulled the savage creature from him.

And then, suddenly, the entire face of the foremost shelk blackened and smoked!

The creature screamed its clacking scream and fell choking to the ground. Another shelk screamed and then another! Tumithak's foes were falling away from him, running, clambering across the rough terrain, and dying as they fell. Plainly, on those that fell and died were the searing black marks of the fire-hose! Tumithak turned, and was only half surprised at the sight that greeted his eyes.

Some distance away a flyer had landed. Crouched at the door, smoking fire-hoses in their hands, were Datto, Thopf and Gastofac. As they saw the last of the shelks fall, they rushed forward, shouting, and Datto grasped Tumithak's hand in his own.

"We thought you lost, Lord of Shawm!" he cried. "We thought you lost!" and there was more emotion in his voice than Tumithak had ever heard before. For a moment he pumped Tumithak's hand up and down and then turned away as Thopf put his hand on Tumithak's shoulder and said with heartfelt sincerity: "Thank the High One you have been spared to see this victory."

Tumithak staggered a little.

"We are victorious, then?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

Datto grinned all over his smoke-blackened face.

"Victorious? Proud would I be to hail you as Lord of Kaymak, were Kaymak aught but a smoking ruin. I doubt if a hundred hell towers yet stand in Kaymak. And the few hundred shelks that were left alive flee southward."

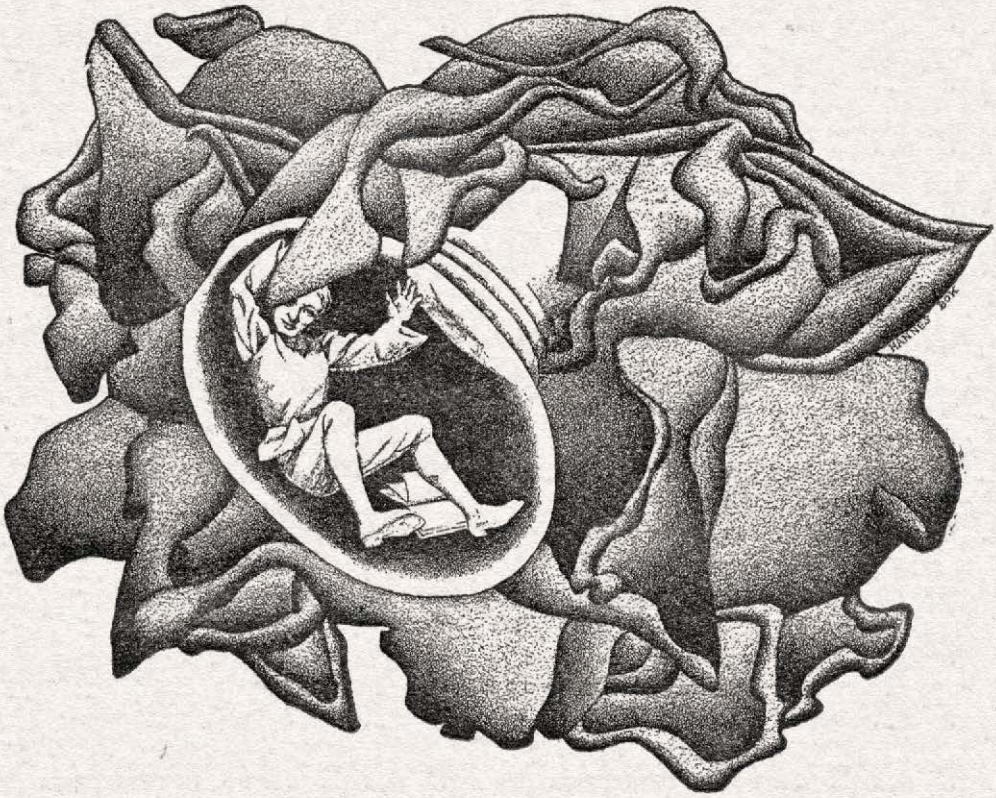
Tumithak nodded, as though in silent prayer. But his eyes still had battle hunger in them.

"Let us join our forces," he said. "We may yet be in at the finish."

The door of the machine closed behind them. The machine rose, its wings flapping slowly, and flew off into the haze-blanketed south.

PENDULUM

Prisoner of Time was he, outlawed from Life and Death alike—the strange, brooding creature who watched the ages roll by and waited half fearfully for—eternity?



By RAY BRADBURY and HENRY HASSE

"I THINK," shrilled Erjas, "that this is our most intriguing discovery on any of the worlds we have yet visited!"

His wide, green-shimmering wings fluttered, his beady bird eyes flashed excitement. His several companions bobbed their heads in agreement, the greenish-gold down on their slender necks ruffling softly. They were perched on what had once been a moving sidewalk but was now only a twisted ribbon of wreckage overlooking the vast expanse of a ruined city.

"Yes," Erjas continued, "it's baffling, fantastic! It—it has no reason for being." He pointed unnecessarily to the object of their attention, resting on the high stone plaza a short distance away. "Look at it! Just a huge tubular pendulum hanging from that towering framework! And the machinery, the coggery which must have once sent it swinging . . . I flew up there a while ago to examine it, but it's hopelessly corroded."

"But the head of the pendulum!" another of the bird creatures said awedly. "A hollow chamber—transparent, glassite—and that awful thing staring out of it. . . ."

Pressed close to the inner side of the pendulum head was a single human skeleton. The whitened skull seemed to stare out over the desolate, crumbling city as though regarding with amusement the heaps of powdery masonry and the bare steel girders that drooped to the ground, giving the effect of huge spiders poised to spring.

"It's enough to make one shudder—the way that thing grins! Almost as though—"

"The grin means nothing!" Erjas interrupted annoyedly. "That is only the skeletal remains of one of the mammal creatures who once, undoubtedly, inhabited this world." He shifted nervously from one spindly leg to the other, as he glanced again at the grinning skull. "And yet, it does seem to be almost—triumphant! And why are there no more of them around? Why is he the only one . . . and why is he encased in that fantastic pendulum head?"

"We shall soon know," another of the bird creatures trilled softly, glancing at their spaceship which rested amidst the ruins, a short distance away. "Orfleew is even now deciphering the strange writing in the book he salvaged from the pendulum head. We must not disturb him."

"How did he get the book? I see no opening in that transparent chamber."

"The long pendulum arm is hollow, apparently in order to vacuum out the cell. The book was crumbling with age when Orfleew got it out, but he saved most of it."

"I wish he would hurry! Why must he—"

"Shh! Give him time. Orfleew will decipher the writing; he has an amazing genius for alien languages."

"Yes. I remember the metal tablets on that tiny planet in the constellation—"

"Here he comes now!"

"He's finished already!"

"We shall soon know the story. . . ."

The bird creatures fairly quivered as Orfleew appeared in the open doorway of their spaceship, carefully carrying a sheaf of yellowed pages. He waved to them, spread his wings and soared outward. A moment later he alighted beside his companions on their narrow perch.

"The language is simple," Orfleew told them, "and the story is a sad one. I will read it to you and then we must depart, for there is nothing we can do on this world."

They edged closer to him there on the metal strand, eagerly awaiting the first words. The pendulum hung very straight and very still on a windless world, the transparent head only a few feet above the plaza floor. The grinning skull still peered out as though hugely amused or hugely satisfied. Orfleew took one more fleeting look at it . . . then he opened the crumbling notebook and began to read.

MY NAME is John Layeville. I am known as "The Prisoner of Time." People, tourists from all over the world, come to look at me in my swinging pendulum. School children, on the electrically moving sidewalks surrounding the plaza, stare at me in childish awe. Scientists, studying me, stand out there and train their instruments

on the swinging pendulum head. Oh, they could stop the swinging, they could release me—but now I know that will never happen. This all began as a punishment for me, but now I am an enigma to science. I seem to be immortal. It is ironic.

A punishment for me! Now, as through a mist, my memory spins back to the day when all this started. I remember I had found a way to bridge time gaps and travel into futurity. I remember the time device I built. No, it did not in any way resemble this pendulum—my device was merely a huge box-like affair of specially treated metal and glassite, with a series of electric rotors of my own design which set up conflicting, but orderly, fields of stress. I had tested it to perfection no less than three times, but none of the others in the Council of Scientists would believe me. They all laughed. And Leske laughed. Especially Leske, for he has always hated me.

I offered to demonstrate, to prove. I invited the Council to bring others—all the greatest minds in the scientific world. At last, anticipating an amusing evening at my expense, they agreed.

I shall never forget that evening when a hundred of the world's greatest scientists gathered in the main Council laboratory. But they had come to jeer, not to cheer. I did not care, as I stood on the platform beside my ponderous machine and listened to the amused murmur of voices. Nor did I care that millions of other unbelieving eyes were watching by television, Leske having indulged in a campaign of mockery against the possibility of time travel. I did not care, because I knew that in a few minutes Leske's campaign would be turned into victory for me. I would set my rotors humming, I would pull the control switch—and my machine would flash away into a time dimension and back again, as I had already seen it do three times. Later we would send a man out in the machine.

The moment arrived. But fate had decreed it was to be my moment of doom. Something went wrong, even now I do not know what or why. Perhaps the television concentration in the room affected the stress of the time-fields my rotors set up. The last thing I remember seeing, as I reached out and touched the main control switch, were the neat rows of smiling white faces of the important men seated in the laboratory. My hand came down on the switch. . . .

Even now I shudder, remembering the vast mind-numbing horror of that moment. A terrific sheet of electrical flame, greenish and writhing and alien, leaped across the laboratory from wall to wall, blasting into ashes everything in its path!

Before millions of television witnesses I had slain the world's greatest scientists!

No, not all. Leske and myself and a few others who were behind the machine escaped with severe burns. I was least injured of all, which seemed to increase the fury of the populace against me. I was swept to a hasty trial, faced jeering throngs who called out for my death.

"Destroy the time machine," was the watchword, "and destroy this murderer with it!"

Murderer! I had only sought to help humanity. In vain I tried to explain the accident, but popular resentment is a thing not to be reasoned with.

One day, weeks later, I was taken from my secret prison and hurried, under heavy guard, to the hospital room where Leske lay. He raised himself on one arm and his smouldering eyes looked at me. That's all I could see of him, just his eyes; the rest of him was swathed in bandages. For a moment he just looked; and if ever I saw insanity, but a cunning insanity, in a man's eyes, it was then.

For about ten seconds he looked, then with a great effort he pointed a bulging, bandaged arm at me.

"No, do not destroy him," he mumbled to the authorities gathered around. "Destroy his machine, yes, but save the parts. I have a better plan, a fitting one, for this man who murdered the world's greatest scientists."

I remembered Leske's old hatred of me, and I shuddered.

IN THE weeks that followed, one of my guards told me with a sort of malicious pleasure of my time device being dismantled, and secret things being done with it. Leske was directing the operations from his bed.

At last came the day when I was led forth and saw the huge pendulum for the first time. As I looked at it there, fantastic and formidible, I realized as never before the extent of Leske's insane revenge. And the populace seemed equally vengeful, equally cruel, like the ancient Romans on a gladiatorial holiday. In a sudden panic of terror, I shrieked and tried to leap away.

That only amused the people who crowded the electrical sidewalks around the plaza. They laughed and shrieked derisively.

My guards thrust me into the glass pendulum head and I lay there quivering, realizing the irony of my fate. This pendulum had been built from the precious metal and glassite of my own time device! It was intended as a monument to my slaughtering! I was being put on exhibition for life within my own executioning device! The crowd roared thunderous approval, damning me.

Then a little click and a whirring above me, and my glass prison began to move. It increased in speed. The arc of the pendulum's swing lengthened. I remember how I pounded at the glass, futilely screaming, and how my hands bled. I remember the rows of faces becoming blurred white blobs before me. . . .

I did not become insane, as I had thought at first I would. I did not mind it so much, that first night. I couldn't sleep but it wasn't uncomfortable. The lights of the city were comets with tails that pelted from right to left like foaming fireworks. But as the night wore on I felt a gnawing in my stomach that grew worse until I became very sick. The next day was the same and I couldn't eat anything. In the days that followed they never stopped the pendulum, not once. They slid my food down the hollow pendulum stem in little round parcels that plunked at my feet. The first time I attempted eating I was unsuccessful; it wouldn't stay down. In desperation I hammered against the cold glass with my fists until they bled again, and I cried hoarsely, but heard nothing but my own weak words muffled in my ears.

After an infinitude of misery, I began to eat and even sleep while traveling back and forth this way . . . they had allowed me small glass loops on the floor with which I fastened myself down at night and slept a soundless slumber, without sliding. I even began to take an interest in the world outside, watching it tip one way and another, back and forth and up and down, dizzily before my eyes until they ached. The monotonous movements never changed. So huge was the pendulum that it shadowed one hundred feet or more with every majestic sweep of its gleaming shape, hanging from the metal intestines of the machine overhead. I estimated that it took four or five seconds for it to traverse the arc.

On and on like this—for how long would it be? I dared not think of it. . . .

DAY by day I began to concentrate on the gaping, curiosity-etched faces outside—faces that spoke soundless words, laughing and pointing at me, the prisoner of time, traveling forever nowhere. Then after a time—was it weeks or months or years?—the town

people ceased to come and it was only tourists who came to stare. . . .

Once a day the attendants sent down my food, once a day they sent down a tube to vacuum out the cell. The days and nights ran together in my memory until time came to mean very little to me. . . .

IT WAS not until I knew, inevitably, that I was doomed forever to this swinging chamber, that the thought occurred to me to leave a written record. Then the idea obsessed me and I could think of nothing else.

I had noticed that once a day an attendant climbed into the whirring coggery overhead in order to drop my food down the tube. I began to tap code signals along the tube, a request for writing materials. For days, weeks, months, my signals remained unanswered. I became infuriated—and more persistent.

Then, at long last, the day when not only my packet of food came down the tube, but with it a heavy notebook, and writing materials! I suppose the attendant above became weary at last of my tappings! I was in a perfect ecstasy of joy at this slight luxury.

I have spent the last few days in recounting my story, without any undue elaboration. I am weary now of writing, but I shall continue from time to time—in the present tense instead of the past.

My pendulum still swings in its unvarying arc. I am sure it has been not months, but years! I am accustomed to it now. I think if the pendulum were to stop suddenly, I should go mad at the motionless existence!

(*Later*): There is unusual activity on the electrically moving sidewalks surrounding me. Men are coming, scientists, and setting up peculiar looking instruments with which to study me at a distance. I think I know the reason. I guessed it some time ago. I have not recorded the years, but I suspect that *I have already outlived Leske and all the others!* I know my cheeks have developed a short beard which suddenly ceased growing, and I feel a curious, tingling vitality. I feel that I shall outlive them all! I cannot account for it, nor can they out there, those scientists who now examine me so scrupulously. And they dare not stop my pendulum, my little world, for fear of the effect it may have on me!

(*Still later*): These men, these puny scientists, have dropped a microphone down the tube to me! They have actually remembered that I was once a great scientist, encased here cruelly. In vain they have sought the reason for my longevity; now they want me to converse with them, giving my symptoms and reactions and suggestions! They are perplexed, but hopeful, desiring the secret of eternal life to which they feel I can give them a clue. I have already been here two hundred years, they tell me; they are the fifth generation.

At first I said not a word, paying no attention to the microphone. I merely listened to their babblings and pleadings until I weared of it. Then I grasped the microphone and looked up and saw their tense, eager faces, awaiting my words.

"One does not easily forgive such an injustice as this," I shouted. "And I do not believe I shall be ready to until five more generations."

Then I laughed. Oh, how I laughed.

"He's insane!" I heard one of them say: "The secret of immortality may lie somehow with him, but I feel we shall never learn it; and we dare not stop the pendulum—that might break the time-field, or whatever it is that's holding him in thrall. . . ."

(MUCH LATER): It has been a longer time than I care to think, since I wrote those last words. Years . . . I know not how many.

have almost forgotten how to hold a pencil in my fingers to write.

Many things have transpired, many changes have come in the crazy world out there.

Once I saw wave after wave of planes, so many that they darkened the sky, far out in the direction of the ocean, moving toward the city; and a host of planes arising from here, going out to meet them; and a brief, but lurid and devastating battle in which planes fell like leaves in the wind; and *some* planes triumphantly returning, I know not which ones. . . .

But all that was very long ago, and it matters not to me. My daily parcels of food continue to come down the pendulem stem; I suspect that it has become a sort of ritual, and the inhabitants of the city, whoever they are now, have long since forgotten the legend of why I was encased here. My little world continues to swing in its arc, and I continue to observe the puny little creatures out there who blunder through their brief span of life.

Already I have outlived generations! Now I want to outlive the very last one of them! I shall!

. . . Another thing, too, I have noticed. The attendants who daily drop the parcels of food for me, and vacuum out the cell, are robots! Square, clumsy, ponderous and four-limbed things—unmistakably metal robots, only vaguely human in shape.

. . . I begin to see more and more of these clumsy robots about the city. Oh, yes, humans too—but *they* only come on sight-seeing tours and pleasure jaunts now; *they* live, for the most part, in luxury high among the towering buildings. Only the robots occupy the lower level now, doing all the menial and mechanical tasks necessary to the operation of the city. This, I suppose, is progress as these self-centered beings have willed it.

. . . robots are becoming more complicated, more human in shape and movements . . . and more numerous . . . uncanny . . . I have a premonition. . . .

(*Later*): It has come! I knew it! Vast, surging activity out there . . . the humans, soft from an aeon of luxury and idleness, could not even escape . . . those who tried, in their rocket planes, were brought down by the pale, rosy electronic beams of the robots . . . others of the humans, more daring or desperate, tried to sweep low over the central robot base and drop thermite bombs—but the robots had erected an electronic barrier which hurled the bombs back among the planes, causing inestimable havoc. . . .

The revolt was brief, but inevitably successful. I suspect that all human life except mine has been swept from the earth. I begin to see, now, how cunningly the robots devised it.

The humans had gone forward recklessly and blindly to achieve their Utopia; they had designed their robots with more and more intricacy, more and more finesse, until the great day when they were able to leave the entire operation of the city to the robots—under the guidance perhaps of one or two humans. But somewhere, somehow, one of those robots was imbued with a spark of intelligence; it began to think, slowly but precisely; it began to add unto itself, perhaps secretly; until finally it had evolved itself into a terribly efficient unit of inspired intelligence, a central mechanical Brain which planned this revolt.

At least, so I pictured it. Only the robots are left now—but very intelligent robots. A group of them came yesterday and stood before my swinging pendulum and seemed to confer among themselves. They surely must recognize me as one of the humans, the last one left. Do they plan to destroy me too?

No. I must have become a legend, even among the robots. My pendulum still swings. They have now encased the op-

erating mechanism beneath a protective glassite dome. They have erected a device whereby my daily parcel of food is dropped to me mechanically. They no longer come near me; they seem to have forgotten me.

This infuriates me! Well, I shall outlast them too! After all, they are but products of the human brain . . . I shall outlast everything even remotely human! I swear it!

(MUCH LATER): Is this the end? *I have seen the end of the reign of the robots!* Yesterday, just as the sun was crimsoning in the west, I perceived the hordes of things that came swarming out of space, expanding in the heavens . . . alien creatures fluttering down, great gelatinous masses of black that clustered thickly over everything. . . .

I saw the robot rocket planes criss-crossing the sky on pillars of scarlet flame, blasting into the black masses with their electronic beams—but the alien things were unperturbed and unaffected! Closer and closer they pressed to earth, until the robot rockets began to dart helplessly for shelter.

To no avail. The silvery robot ships began crashing to earth in ghastly devastation, like drops of mercury splashing on tiles. . . .

And the black gelatinous masses came ever closer, to spread over the earth, to crumble the city and corrode whatever metal was left exposed.

Except my pendulum. They came dripping darkly down over it, over the glassite dome which protects the whirring wheels and roaring bowels of the mechanism. The city has crumbled, the robots are destroyed, but my pendulum still moves, the only moving thing on this world now . . . and I know that fact puzzles these alien things and they will not be content until they have stopped it. . . .

This all happened yesterday. I am lying very still now, watching them. Most of them are gathering out there over the ruins of the city, preparing to leave—except a few of the black quivering things that are still hanging to my pendulum, almost blotting out the sunlight; and a few more above, near the operating machinery, concentrating those same emanations by which they corroded the robots. They are determined to do a complete job here. I know that in a few minutes they will begin to take effect, even through the glassite shield. I shall continue to write until my pendulum stops swinging. . . . . it is happening now. I can feel a peculiar grinding and grating in the coggery above. Soon my tiny glassite world will cease its relentless arc.

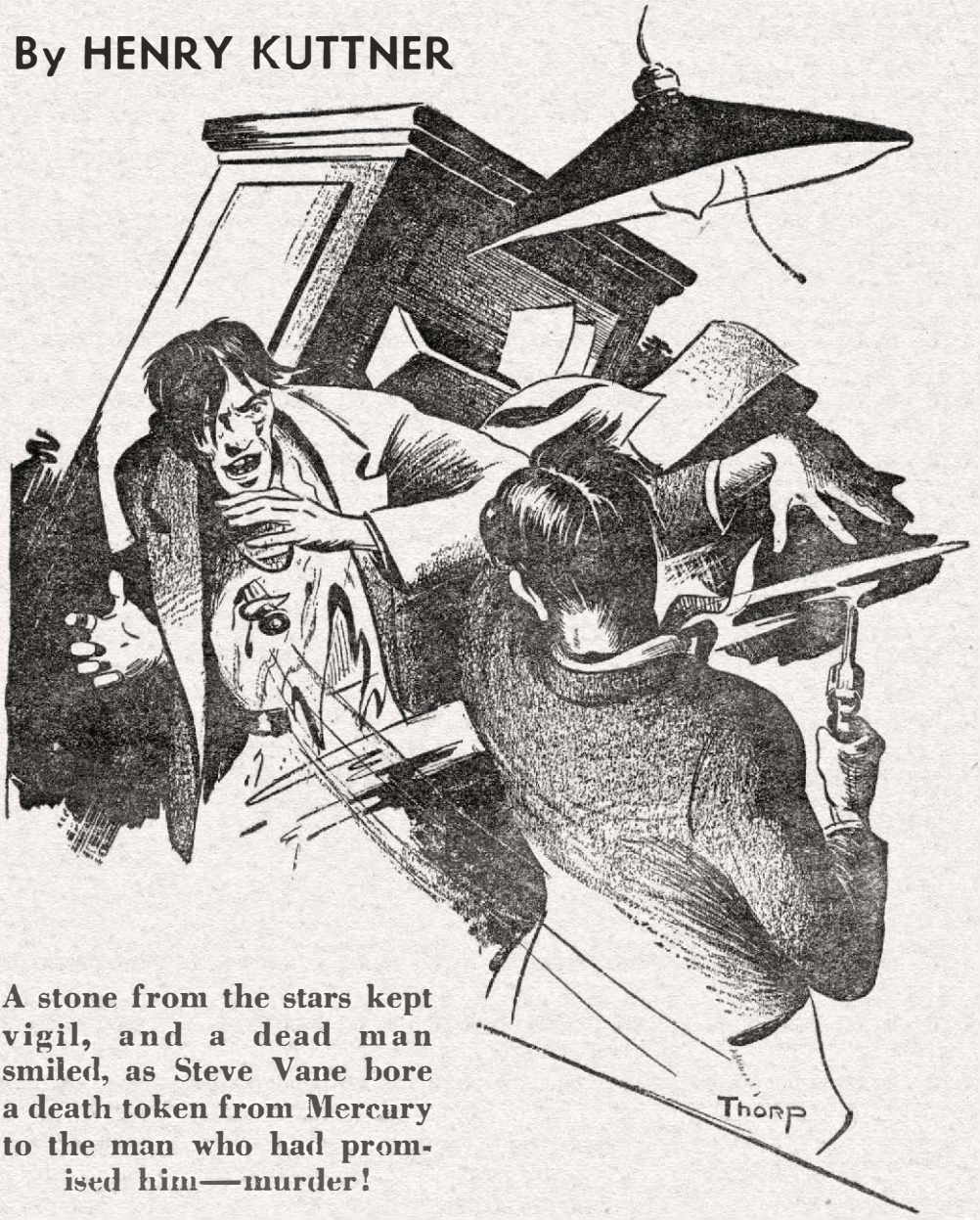
I feel now only a fierce elation flaming within me, for after all, this is *my* victory! I have conquered over the men who planned this punishment for me, and over countless other generations, and over the final robots themselves! There is nothing more I desire except annihilation, and I am sure that will come automatically when my pendulum ceases, bringing me to a state of unendurable motionlessness. . . .

It is coming now. Those black, gelatinous shapes above are drifting away to join their companions. The mechanism is grinding raucously. My arc is narrowing . . . smaller . . . smaller. . . .

I feel . . . so strange. . . .

RED GEM of MERCURY

By HENRY KUTTNER



A stone from the stars kept vigil, and a dead man smiled, as Steve Vane bore a death token from Mercury to the man who had promised him—murder!

CHAPTER ONE

Stone from the Stars

THE noise of pursuit was growing louder. Steve Vane's lungs ached with each knife-thrust, gasping breath of the icy air. His gray prison garments were no protection against the wintry breeze, and his thin shoes were already wet with snow and beginning to freeze.

It was hard to keep going. It would be far easier to give up the mad attempt,

to stop and wait, with his hands in the air, till the guards came and took him back to the bare gray walls of his cell. But—Vane took a quick glance at the grim-faced man racing along beside him—if tough little Tony Apollo could keep going, certainly husky, big-shouldered Steve Vane could grit his teeth and stagger along. But where would it end? The break had been hopeless from the start, doomed to certain failure. Only the iron determination of Tony Apollo, and the burning sense of injustice rankling within Vane had kept the latter's will firm.

"Pasqual framed us both," Apollo had said, his dark face sombre with hatred. "I've been in here longer than you have—but I'm getting out now. If you're smart, you're coming with me. One of us has a chance to get Pasqual before the cops nail us."

And so the two had planned and fled. Blue and shaking with cold, they plunged along the bank of the river gorge toward the cabin Apollo had said would serve as a hideout.

"How — how much further?" Vane managed to gasp, and hated himself for the weakness his question betrayed. Apollo managed a twisted grin.

"Just over the ridge, kid. Dunno if I can make it. Those damn guards—that bullet went into my lungs. Steve, if I—if I croak, get Pasqual for me. When he framed me into the big house, I told him I'd come back, and he knows I've never broke my word. I—"

Apollo grimaced and coughed blood. He lurched; Vane gripped the smaller man's arm and pulled him along for a few steps. Then the gangster pulled free and plunged ahead, ploughing up snow as he ran.

TRUE enough, Vane thought, Apollo had never broken his word. The whole set-up was fantastic. Two years ago Tony Apollo had been the underworld king of Kentonville, and had tried to bribe Vane and failed. For, in those days, Steve Vane had been a struggling, idealistic lawyer in the slum district.

Then big Mike Pasqual, Apollo's lieutenant, had stepped in. Very cleverly he had framed his chief. Apollo had gone to prison and Pasqual reigned in his place. Anybody who got in his way was crushed. As Steve Vane had been crushed—suspended from the bar and given a long prison term because of certain papers Pasqual had had forged. Now the two doomed men fled along the snowy brink of the gorge in a gray, ominous half-light, with a wintry breeze numbing their bodies. And behind them came men with guns.

Almost at the summit of the ridge it happened. Apollo clutched at his side, lurched, and cried out sharply. Vane whirled; his hand went out in a futile gesture. For already the little gangster was falling. . . .

The treacherous snow banked on the edge of the abyss crumbled beneath him. He was gone almost before Vane realized it. Sick with horror, the lawyer moved forward and peered over. He saw the body, far below, bound off a rock and vanish into the swift, turbulent river.

Tony Apollo was dead, and he had failed to keep his last promise.

A shout sounded eerily from the distance. Vane heard the noise of a shot—the high whine and the sharp report. He glanced over his shoulder, saw three dark forms, and caught his breath, hesitating. What now? He had not realized before just how much he had come to depend on Apollo's grim, iron will. But the gangster was gone—

The hideout! It lay just over the ridge. Perhaps there were guns there. Vane broke into a stumbling run, topped the rise, and saw below him a broad, shallow valley. A cabin, its roof pillowed with snow, was not far away. Pines rose

thickly from the whiteness of the ground.

The key was hidden in the hollow log Apollo had mentioned. Vane burst into the cabin in a flurry of snow, kicking the door shut behind him and barring it. His first glance showed him a rack of well-oiled rifles within easy reach The feel of the smooth stock was comforting to his fingers.

He went to a window and peered out. The pursuers were just coming over the rise. It would be easy to pick them off now, one by one. Vane cuddled the rifle against his cheek; his finger tightened on the trigger. But he did not fire.

He had never yet killed a man. Even though his ideals had changed, in the slow torment of months of prison, into a dull, burning hatred and resentment, yet he realized that this rage was focused on one man only. Pasqual. The squat gangster chief who had framed him into disgrace. The guards—well, they would not hesitate to shoot him down, given the opportunity. But that was their job. Vane said "Hell" under his breath and fired over the heads of the three.

They paused very briefly and then dived for cover. After a time Vane could see them cautiously coming closer, taking advantage of every hiding place. He fired again.

One of the guards yelled, "Come on out! You can't get away!"

"I've got plenty of ammunition," Vane shouted back. "And I'm staying right here."

THEN, without warning, it happened. A shrill keening almost above the threshold of hearing grew suddenly louder. Vane, startled, glanced up. Beyond the tops of the pines he saw the gray, cloudy sky—

He screamed, dropping the gun, and flung up his arms to shield his face, falling back in instant reaction. For rushing toward him from the sky came a dot—a circle—a huge black thing that grew larger by split-seconds. It was like standing on a railroad track and watching a locomotive plunge toward you. One had only the single impression of something—a meteor?—rushing, expanding, growing—

Earth-shaking and thunderous was the explosion. Vane felt the floor rise up under his feet; he was hurled through the air, his ear-drums almost broken by the violence of the sound. Swift movement, and a flash of blinding light, and then darkness, complete and quiet. . . .

HE could not have been unconscious long. He woke to find himself lying in the snow, his head throbbing with pain. Dazedly he heard a voice say, "Alive, eh? You looked like a goner to me."

Vane sat up and looked around. He realized that there were handcuffs on his wrists. He was under a pine, and some distance away was what was left of the cabin. It was like a house of cards that had collapsed. Only a miracle had enabled Vane to survive.

He looked up and saw the blue-jowled, bulldog face of a guard. The man nodded and jerked his thumb down the slope.

"There," he said. "That's what hit. Airship or something."

Vane looked, and his eyes widened with amazement. An airship—no! No Earthly vessel, obviously. Shaped like a tear-drop, it had fallen thirty feet from the cabin and had dug a crater out of the snowy ground. Its hull was split and riven in a dozen places by the shock of the impact. A crystalline green powder carpeted the ground and cloaked the trees for yards around.

The ship itself was perhaps twenty feet long, made of a dully-shining metal, bluish in hue. The two remaining guards were busy, pulling something through a yawning gap that split the hull.

The man standing over Vane bent and jerked the prisoner to his feet. "Somebody was in it," he grunted. "Hurt or probably dead. Come along." Vane let himself be pulled toward the wreck. Despite the sick hopelessness that filled him at his capture, he was also conscious of an overwhelming curiosity. Would it be that for the first time in human history a—*spaceship* had reached the Earth? And its passenger—what would he be like?

The two guards were kneeling beside the body, one of them trying to force brandy between the alien being's lips. Vane's captor halted behind them, his hand tightly gripping the lawyer's arm. A whistle of amazement escaped his lips.

"Jeez!" he muttered. "What a freak!"

A freak, truly, Vane thought, in this world. Fully eight feet tall the being was, man-shaped, with a tremendous barrel chest and thick legs jointed in several places. The clothing was skin tight, ripped and torn to reveal greenish skin that gleamed with pale radiance.

The lips, Vane saw, were broad, fleshy, and indigo-blue in color. And there was but one eye; the other had vanished in a crimson smear that matched in hue the red jewel that gleamed on the being's forehead.

Vane stared at the strange gem, conscious of an inexplicable fascination that seemed to radiate from it. Larger than a hen's egg, it seemed to be embedded in the greenish flesh of the bulging forehead and the bone beneath.

And—*it lived!*

CHAPTER TWO

The Gift of Power

ONE guard took the bottle from the bluish lips. "It's dead," he said slowly. "I don't—"

The monster groaned. The massive head turned. The single eye passed over the faces of the four men. Vane felt an odd sense of shock as the weird gaze focused briefly upon him.

Simultaneously an icy chill shook Vane's mind. He went sick, giddy, and momentarily blind. Beside him, he heard the guards gasp, and realized that they felt as he did.

It passed. Vane heard a voice *inside his mind.*

Inaudible, yes—but clearer than any bell-tone he heard it.

"For Gawd's sake!" a guard said, amazedly. "I—I'm hearing things—"

He paused.

The inaudible voice commanded, "Silence!" And the word's meaning was somehow as clear to Vane as it would have been if spoken aloud in modern English.

"I am Zaravin," the mental voice said. "I must give you four my message swiftly, for I have little time left. I am from . . . the planet you call Mercury. The innermost planet."

Vane tried to draw back, but could not. His muscles seemed frozen into paralysis. Sweat was cold on his forehead.

Unreasoning horror of the unknown made his stomach a sick void.

The telepathic voice went on.

"Listen. . . . Two months out from Mercury I fell ill . . . with the sleeping death. When I awoke, all was lost. The ship needed continual guidance. Since I could not carry sufficient fuel, I had to manufacture it on the way . . . and I awoke too late. There was not enough fuel for me to prevent this crash."

The jewel on Zaravin's forehead flamed with red, baleful light. It held Vane's gaze.

The Mercutian went on:

"It is the Stone from the Stars that you see. It is the bestower of all power. Ages ago it fell, embedded in a meteorite,

brought from some alien Universe, perhaps . . . it is alive. All knowledge, all strength, is hidden in it. You doubt me, I see. . . . Jaeckel, Bester, Hanley. . . . Stephen Vane. . . . How, then, do I know the names of you four?"

There was silence. All around the green dust sparkled eerily, and drifted down from the trees. A chill wind blew up flurries of snow. The distant sound of the tumbling river seemed very loud in the utter silence.

"The Stone from the Stars gives all power," Zaravin told the Earthmen soundlessly. "It is . . . what you call . . . symbiosis. For it lives, with a strange, silicate life of its own. Perhaps, in the unknown abyss from which it came, it drew its life-force from rays . . . alien suns. . . . I do not know. On Mercury, it feeds upon the life-energy of its host. And now I am its host."

The blue, fleshy lips twisted in pain. Shining blood made a pool around the bulbous head.

"It is a parasite and drains the life-force. But in return it shares its own wonderful powers with the owner—powers of telepathy and will. These powers must be used sparingly, for they are exhausting. The owner of the gem at times falls into a state of suspended animation, during which the jewel rests and revitalizes itself. When I started this first interplanetary voyage, our ruler gave it to me, knowing that only with its aid could I conquer the tremendous obstacles. And there was only one way for the Stone to be removed. Once it finds a host, it remains there during the entire life-span of that host. Our ruler was forced to kill himself in order that I might have the gem. . . ."

The weird, soundless voice grew urgent.

"The power of the jewel must not die! Even though it is lost to Mercury, it will aid the men of Earth. Take it, one of you—use it! And when your race has conquered space-travel, take the Stone from the Stars back to my people. Remember—it gives all power to the owner!"

The Mercutian's body twisted convulsively. A torrent of blood gushed from between the thick blue lips. A choking gasp sounded as the huge body jerked. The bulbous head rolled aside as the single eye glazed in death.

And—the Stone from the Stars leaped from Zaravin's forehead!

VANE realized that the Mercutian was lifeless. His horrified eyes followed the path of the jewel.

It soared out swiftly, turning over and over, rolled down a little slope of snow, and then lay still and shimmering.

Silence. Time itself had stopped. The murmur of the river was a deafening thunder.

One of the guards gave a curious gasping sound. It broke the spell. Vane drew an unsteady breath, shivering a little. And then, before any of his captors could move, he wrenched free from the grasp on his arm and dived forward.

He fell on his knees. His handcuffed wrists hit together painfully. His cupped fingers found the Stone from the Stars and lifted it.

It lay in his palm, red against the snow he had scooped up with it.

"Vane!" a guard roared. "Drop that—" that—"

The Stone blazed, throwing unearthly reddish reflections on white snow and cold-pallid skin.

It held fascination for Vane. He lifted it toward his forehead. A heavy hand gripped his shoulder, flung him back. But too late.

The Stone from the Stars leaped from Vane's palm. He felt an instant of grinding, sickening agony clashing within his brain. It lasted only a moment, and was gone.

He stood up, throwing off the hand that held his shoulder. The guard—it was bulldog-faced Hanley—went for his gun.

As he drew it, something made Vane say curtly, "Drop it! Drop the gun, Hanley! Quick!"

"Like hell I will," the guard snarled. There was a soft little plop at his feet. The automatic had fallen into the snow. Hanley said, "Whup!" and started to bend over to recover the weapon.

Vane said, "Don't move!" Hanley froze. The lawyer whirled toward the others. "Don't move, any of you!"

And the guards stood motionless. Jaeckel was caught off balance, with one leg in the air. He wavered, toppled, and fell flat on his face.

Vane stood unmoving for a time. Presently he reached up and gingerly touched the gem. His fingers groped searchingly.

The Stone had attached itself permanently to his forehead. It had sunk in, blazing like a caste mark of some Hindu sect, above and between his brows . . .

UNREASONING horror shook Vane. He clawed at the jewel, tried to wrench it from its place. He could not budge the gem. His nails slipped off the smooth, cold surface. His wrists began to bleed as the handcuffs dug into them.

It was nightmare—the guards living statues, the jewel flaming in his living flesh and bone, the dead silence, broken only by the river's murmur . . .

Vane lowered his hands slowly and stood staring at the cuffs. Apparently Zaravin had not lied. The Stone from the Stars gave its possessor strange powers.

And that meant—

Suddenly Vane thought of Pasqual. Big Mike Pasqual, ruthless, all-powerful lord of Kentonville's underworld. Too smart for the law. Too strong for his enemies. All-powerful—

Like hell!

Vane's smile was not good to see. He was visualizing Pasqual, frozen motionless as the guards had been, screaming for help, facing the death he had arranged for so many others.

The lawyer turned to Hanley. His young face, with lines of bitterness months of prison had engraved upon it, was hard.

"Unlock my handcuffs, one of you," he said quietly.

"Yeah?" Hanley's voice was strained but mocking. "I don't know what you've done to me, but I'm not going to take those cuffs off. I won't—*I won't—*"

His voice rose into a scream. *Because all the time he was talking,* Hanley was reaching into his pocket, taking out a key-ring, selecting a small key, walking forward and reaching toward Vane's extended wrists . . .

"Thanks," Vane said as the lock clicked. He shook the cuffs off and gingerly massaged his wrists. "Now—let's see. These prison clothes. They won't do. But a guard's uniform—" He shook his head, pondering.

"And I can't leave you here. You'd freeze in no time. I don't know why the devil I care about that, but—I've got it. Listen, the three of you. In ten minutes you'll be perfectly normal again. You'll go directly back to the prison. You won't remember anything that happened after you came into this valley. Tony Apollo and I are dead. You saw us fall into the gorge. We're dead. Do you understand?"

"We understand," the three chorused. Jaeckel's voice was muffled as he lay face down in the snow.

Vane grinned suddenly. "Okay, boys," he said, turning. "Good luck!" And he hurried up the slope toward the ridge and freedom. . . .

HIS mind was furiously active. What now? First of all, he had to get rid of these betraying clothes and find more suitable garments. What about the guards? For a second Vane felt an unreasoning premonition, but dismissed it casually. After all, he owned the magic gem that gave its owner incredible powers. And—so far—it seemed to work.

It worked on a tourist Vane stopped, too. The man was about his build, he noticed, and was driving a sedan slowly along the highway that twisted through the mountains near by. Vane simply stood beside the road and commanded—inaudibly—"Slow down and stop. Be careful." He did not wish to see the man kill himself by plunging over the precipice that gaped across the highway.

The sedan stopped. The man got out. He stared at Vane and gasped, "You're the escaped con! Don't shoot—"

"Take off your clothes," Vane said.

"I will not!" the man said in a shocked voice, shucking his overcoat. He removed his necktie. "Undress in the open air? I've never done such a thing in my life!" He pulled off his pants. "I won't undress and that's flat!"

"Keep your underwear," Vane smiled, as the man continued to strip. "Swell. Now get in back and cover yourself up with that afghan I saw there."

"I won't," the man said, crawling into the back seat and pulling the afghan over him. "I won't."

"Now keep quiet."

There was no answer. Vane donned the garments and got in the front seat. He found a comb in an inner pocket and adjusted his hair till a lock of it fell over the jewel that flamed on his forehead. Still he was not satisfied. He picked up the black Homburg that lay on the seat beside him, turned down the brim, and pulled it over his eyes. Peering into the rear-view mirror, he nodded, satisfied. It would do. The gem was hidden from casual scrutiny.

Vane was whistling softly as he slid the car into gear and began the long journey into Kentonville. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

The Man Who Was Dead

SIX hours later, at five-thirty, Vane reached his destination. He paused on the outskirts and bought a paper from an excited newsboy.

"Big mystery, mister," the kid was yelping. "Men from Mars—escaped convict—jeez!"

"Sure," Vane said, and gave the boy a dollar he found in his pocket. Later he parked under a street light and examined the headlines. A worried frown puckered his brows.

There was trouble he had not anticipated. His plan had not been successful. The three guards had awakened ten minutes after he left them and started plodding back to the prison. But before they topped the rise they were halted by reinforcements the warden had sent out. The newcomers saw the spaceship, and, worse, they had followed the tracks in the snow.

They read the signs correctly. One of the escaped convicts had fallen into the gorge. The other had escaped; his tracks ended at the highway, where he had obviously boarded an automobile. The dragnet was still out. The mystery of the surviving convict's identify wasn't solved by Hanley, Jaeckel, or Bester. In the face of plain evidence and sane logic, they continued to contend firmly that both Apollo and Vane had fallen into the gorge.

The spaceship made headlines. Wild guesses were made as to its origin. Naturally, the three guards added little light to the problem. They had never seen the ship before. Obviously they

were lying, since their tracks in the snow told a different story. Jaeckel, Hanley, and Bester were now protesting against their confinement in the observation ward.

Vane grinned.

There was a watch in his vest pocket, he found. Five-thirty-five. And, as the newspaper showed, this was Thursday. The lawyer shoved the car into gear.

"Unless Pasqual has changed his methods since I was sent up," he murmured, "his boys are making the rounds on East Third Street right now. Wonder if Uncle Tobe's still in business?"

He had decided on a definite plan. Swiftly he treaded the familiar streets of Kentonville, feeling an odd sense of pleasure at seeing well-known sights again. The City Hall—the old Mattingly mansion—Curlew Park—and the slums.

The tenement district, where Vane had been born and where he had fought his way up from the gutter. The slums were part of Vane. Beneath the squalor and the filth he saw something else, a high, unwavering courage that kept on where all else failed. Kids playing naked under the hydrants, bent old shopkeepers saving their pennies to send their children to school, shapeless, tired-eyed mothers slaving over oven-hot stoves in the blazing summers. . . .

VANE parked the car and turned his head. He said to the man lying under the afghan, "In two minutes you'll wake up and drive to your home. You won't remember anything that's happened since I met you."

There was no answer. Vane emerged from the car and crossed the street, looking up at the twilit sky. Ramshackle tenements loomed all around. Tiny, grimy little shops were visible everywhere. Pushcarts were visible here and there.

Vane entered a small grocery whose window bore the legend: *Elite Grocery.* A bell tinkled as he stepped across the threshold, looking around the gloomy interior. A glass showcase, filled with cheap candy, was at his left. The place looked just the same—like any other grocery in slumtown.

A boy came from the back—a sallow, taffy-haired kid whose thin face was splashed with freckles. He stared at Vane.

"Steve! Jez—" He whirled. "Pop! Hey! Steve's here!"

"Eh? Who? What—" Uncle Tobe came into view. He looked like a gnome, except for his lack of beard. His face was brown and wrinkled as a walnut, and the faded blue eyes blinked at the intruder.

Then, suddenly, he was running forward unsteadily, gripping Vane's arm with skeletal fingers, drawing him back into the store.

"Steve! Come in here, quick! They're all looking for you. Did anyone see you come in?"

Vane smiled, but let himself be pulled back through faded curtains into the back room, where Uncle Tobe lived with his adopted grandson. He sank down on a rickety couch and pulled his hat lower over his eyes. No use frightening his hosts.

"Hold on," he said. "I'm in no danger, Uncle Tobe. Really. I—the police can't touch me."

"You're cleared? They know you were framed?"

"Not—yet," Vane said slowly, and hurried on. "Listen, I want some information. Does Pasqual still collect his protection dough from you?"

"Yeah," the boy broke in. "He sure does. Raised the ante, too. That dirty gorilla of his—he busted Uncle Tobe smack across the face when we was half a buck short. We cleaned out the till, too, but we couldn't make it."

The old man's eyes searched Vane's face. "Something's happened to you,

Steve," he said, frowning. "What is it?"

"Never mind that. When is the collector due again?"

"Today," the youngster burst out. "I'm going to stick a knife in—"

"Mickey!" Uncle Tobe's voice was sharp. "You want to grow up to be a gangster? You shut up!"

Vane said, "Okay. I'm going to wait right here. I want some information from Pasqual's thug, but when he comes I want you to pay him off as usual."

Uncle Tobe bit his lips nervously. "I haven't the money this week, Steve. I'm five dollars short. I've been trying to borrow it, but everybody else is hard up too."

"Swell. Don't worry about that." Vane paused as he heard the sound of a motor starting across the street. He smiled a little. His weird power was still with him. He stood up and put his hand on the old man's stooped shoulder.

"Don't worry about it, Uncle Tobe," he said quietly. "Remember when I was a little kid, you used to slip me candy whenever I came in the store? Remember why you did that?"

The other nodded. "Sure, Steve. You swiped a peppermint stick out of the case once, and I caught you at it. You never did it again."

"No. I remember what you told me—that there was always a right way and a wrong way of getting things, and the wrong way wasn't ever necessary. You said if I wanted candy, you'd give it to me. Well—I owe you plenty, Uncle Tobe. I've thought of what you said a lot of times. And—"

The bell tinkled. Mickey went to the curtain and turned back a white face. "It's Stohm. Uncle Tobe—don't go. I'll go—"

THE old man shook his head, smiling, and went past the boy into the shop. Mickey followed. Vane stepped to the curtains, parted them a trifle, and peered through the aperture.

Uncle Tobe was talking to a hulking, unshaved man who looked like a prize-fighter. His cauliflower ear seemed to verify that conclusion. His neck made a beefy roll of red fat over a dirty collar. Small black eyes, embedded in little pits of gristle, watched the old grocer.

Stohm's hand lay palm up on the counter. He turned it over and smacked it against the wood.

"I can't help that," he grunted. "I want the dough. And now."

"I'll give you all I have," Uncle Tobe said. "I'll make up the rest next week."

Stohm said nothing, but waited. Mickey stood against the counter and glared, his freckles standing out against rage-pallid skin.

Slowly the old man counted out greasy bills, silver, and pennies into the fat palm. Stohm thrust the money carelessly into his pocket.

He said, "Just to make sure you don't forget to make up the difference next week." His heavy foot pushed against a showcase, and it fell over with a shattering crash. Candy showered the floor.

Uncle Tobe sprang forward as Stohm turned to another case. The blue-veined old hand clutched a brawny arm. With a contemptuous grin the gangster swung his fist and knocked the grocer down.

From his hiding-place behind the curtain, Vane watched, feeling a hot tide of rage surge through him at the sight. Before he could move, however, Mickey had leaped forward and drove his small, hard fist into Stohm's somach.

The thug grinned. He picked up Mickey by the shirt, holding him helpless in midair.

Stohm said, "Don't get smart with me, sprout. I'm gonna twist your ears off—"

Vane's hand lifted. He brushed the hat off his head. The Stone from the Stars flamed with unearthly crimson light.

The lawyer's lips moved silently. And Stohm stood helpless, frozen, still gripping Mickey . . .

"Don't move, Stohm," Vane whispered softly. "Don't move a muscle. Just stay like that . . ."

The gangster's eyes were wide. His face was twisted into a grimace. He glared at Mickey as the boy twisted and struck out with his small, fury-driven fists.

They drove into Stohm's face. They flattened his nose and split his lips. They blacked his eyes and raised red welts on his cheeks.

"Leggo o' me!" Mickey shrilled. "Lemme go!"

But Stohm didn't relax his grip. He couldn't. He couldn't even yell for help. Only his eyes spoke of stark horror as he continued to hold the boy before him.

Blood spurted from the gangster's nose, dripped down his chin. Uncle Tobe staggered forward and seized Mickey about the waist. He tore the boy's shirt free from the iron fingers that held it.

"Mickey! Stop it! Stop!" He thrust the lad behind him. "Don't touch him, Stohm. If you do—"

Uncle Tobe stopped, staring at the other.

Vane readjusted the hat on his head and stepped through the curtains. He patted the grocer's shoulder.

"It's okay, Uncle Tobe. I told you it'd be. You're a good scrapper, Mickey. Now be quiet for a bit."

He turned to Stohm.

"Where's Pasqual?"

THE gangster's face remained expressionless, but his voice said thickly, "I dunno."

"When were you to see him again?"

"Tonight. At eight. He's throwing a party tonight at his house. He's celebrating because Tony Apollo's dead."

"Yeah," Vane said thoughtfully. "That's right. Pasqual was always afraid of Apollo. Well, listen to me, Stohm. You're coming along to headquarters, and you're going to confess—answer truthfully every question that's put to you. Hear me?"

"Yes," Stohm said dully.

"My God!" Uncle Tobe's thin frame was shaking. "What'd you do to him, Steve? Hypnotize him?"

"Call it that," Vane nodded. "See you later." He turned to the door.

"You can't go out in the street. You'll be recognized."

The lawyer pulled the Homburg lower over his forehead. "Oh, I dunno. Even if I am—I don't think I'll be arrested." He grinned at the old grocer. "You've helped me a lot, Uncle Tobe. And you, too, Mickey. Fists are better than knives, aren't they?"

"Gee," the boy said, eyeing his hands with awe, "they sure are, Steve."

"Come on," Vane commanded Stohm, and the gangster followed him out of the shop.

Realizing that the latter's bruised face would attract attention, Vane soon managed to find a taxi. The driver was suspicious, but a brief command from the lawyer had instantaneous effects.

"Police station," Vane directed, and settled back on the cushions beside the dazed Stohm.

Newsboys were yelling extras as they rode on. "Spaceship from Mars! Read all about it! Convict still at large!"

"Wonder why people figure Mars is the only planet that has life?" Vane mused. "Well—" His thoughts turned to Pasqual. Eight o'clock. He had a rendezvous with the underworld king at eight . . . He was conscious of an overwhelming hunger. What had the Mercurian said? Vane tried to remember. The Stone from the Stars feeds on life-energy—that would speed up his own basal metabolism, of course. And there

was something else—some warning Zaravin had given. What—well, it didn't matter. Nothing could harm Vane as long as the red jewel glowed on his forehead.

He was soon to learn how wrong he was in thinking this.

CHIEF OF POLICE LANKERSHIM looked up casually as his office door opened. Then he caught his breath and rose half upright, staring at the man on the threshold. Lankershim's hard-bitten, tired face was suddenly ludicrous with amazement.

"Vuh—" he said, and tried again. "*Vane!*"

"Hello," the intruder smiled. "How are you, Chief?"

Lankershim's eyes flickered to Vane's hands, empty at his sides. Then he looked again at the other's face.

"Give a dog a bad name," Vane observed. "I'm not armed."

"How the devil did you get in here? I—" The chief of police abruptly shot out his arm toward the call-buzzer on his desk.

"Stop," Vane said.

Lankershim's forefinger touched the little button, but did not press it. The chief stood there, his left hand flat on the desk, his right arm extended. Slowly his gaze swiveled toward Vane.

His mouth gaped for a shout to summon aid, but no sound emerged.

"That's it," the lawyer nodded. "Remain perfectly quiet and don't say a word. Just listen. I've got a prisoner for you. I left him outside—Stohm, one of Pasqual's men. He'll talk. All you have to do is ask him questions."

Vane glanced at his watch. "I've an appointment soon. See you later. You're an honest cop, Lankershim, and I remember when you used to pound the pavements on the East Side. So I'm turning Stohm over to you. You won't need to third-degree him. For myself—" He hesitated "—I'm not going back to prison. It'll do you no good to throw out a dragnet for me."

Vane turned to the door. "You'll be all right in three minutes. *Adios,* Chief."

He went out, leaving Lankershim an apoplectic statue. The ball wasn't empty. Vane pulled the Homburg lower over his eyes and walked swiftly toward the door. Uniformed men eyed him and turned away.

But one man didn't turn. Vane saw his face light with recognition. He opened his mouth and thrust out a finger in a swift gesture.

He stayed that way, briefly. He was paralyzed, immobile, with one foot in the air and his arm extended. Then, off balance, he flopped to the floor, while a nearby officer stared and came hurriedly forward to administer first-aid.

No one else recognized Vane, and he left. Nobody expected to see him in police headquarters, so he had no difficulty in walking out and hailing a taxi. He was driven to Pasqual's home.

It was an old-fashioned mansion set alone amid wide grounds. Vane noticed a number of cars parked near by. He remembered that Big Mike was throwing a party that night.

He was again conscious of an overwhelming hunger, and a strange, inexplicable lassitude that weakened him. He fought it down, staring at the frog-faced man who opened the door.

"Yeah?"

"Tell Pasqual Steve Vane's here," the lawyer said.

The other stepped back a pace. His hand dived into his pocket.

Vane extended his arms slightly from his sides.

Frog-face said, "Come in," and closed the door as the lawyer entered. Then he deftly frisked his guest. After that he nodded to a chair set against the wall and vanished hurriedly.

VANE sat and looked around. This had once been a palatial Georgian mansion, but Pasqual had redecorated it to suit himself. The bright hall was furnished in the height of garishly bad taste. Vane blinked sleepily. He felt very tired . . .

Frog-face returned. "Come along," he grunted, and led the way upstairs. He paused before a door, thrust it open, and gestured. Vane stepped over the threshold.

He heard the door shut behind him—and lock. He was in a bare room, empty save for curtains that covered one wall. There were no windows.

Two men stepped out from behind the drapes. They held guns aimed unwaveringly at Vane.

"Pasqual's busy," one of them said jeeringly. "He sent us to—"

Briefly the odd lassitude left Vane as he realized the death that menaced him. He snapped, "Drop those guns! Quick!"

"Like hell!"

The automatics clanked on the bare floor. The killers stared down at them, at Vane, and simultaneously lunged forward. They halted in mid-course, paralyzed.

Vane said, "Go tell Pasqual I want to see him."

The two turned stiffly and vanished behind the curtains. A door shut metallically. The lawyer rubbed his forehead with a shaking hand, wincing as he felt the chill surface of the jewel. He felt weak and sick. And tired. His thoughts spun chaotically. What—

The room was moving. No, it was his dizziness. There was a choking, unfamilar odor in Vane's nostrils. Reeling a little, he went to the drapes and drew them aside.

There was a metal door in the wall. It was locked.

Vane felt icy cold. His head was bursting.

It was extremely difficult to move. He turned, staggered, and fell full length on the bare floor.

His body was like ice. He could not move a muscle. He was paralyzed . . .

Gas! Pasqual had pumped anaesthetic gas into the room. Vane recognized the strange odor now. But what manner of gas could have this effect? His brain was perfectly clear, yet he was immobile as a statue. He lay, waiting.

TIME passed. A burly man in a gas mask pulled through the drapes, a gun in one hand. He paused to eye the figure on the floor. Then he pocketed the gun, bent, picked up Vane, and carried him into the next room, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Vane's vision was restricted. He could only stare up at the ceiling. Then a new face appeared, swart, thick-lipped, and brutal. It was Pasqual.

The stocky gangster stood looking down at Vane. His hoarse voice asked, "Dead?"

"Yeah." The other man was removing his gas mask.

Pasqual put his palm flat on Vane's breast. He took a small mirror from his pocket and held it to the lawyer's lips.

"He's stiff, all right," the gangster nodded, rising. "Didn't take much gas to knock him out, either. I dunno what he did to Jim and Oscar, but they said he hexed 'em. Well—" Pasqual's gold teeth flashed in a grin. "That settles one thing. It was Tony Apollo who fell into the gorge up in the mountains. This calls for a celebration, all right."

He pulled at his thick lip, pinching it between thumb and forefinger. "I don't want Vane's body found here. Get the boys to dump him in the river."

The Homburg was still jammed over Vane's forehead. Pasqual bent, tugged at it, and changed his mind. He stood up again.

"Okay," he grunted. "Snap it up.

When the boys get back, they can help celebrate. I spent a cool thousand on champagne."

He went out. Vane tried desperately to move, to speak. It was useless. Yet he wasn't dead. He could hear and see. But he wasn't breathing. His heart had stopped beating. Poison gas—that didn't explain it.

Quite suddenly Vane remembered a sentence Zaravin, the Mercutian, had emphasized.

"The owner of the gem at times falls into a state of suspended animation, during which the jewel rests and revitalizes itself."

Suspended animation! Good God! How long would it last? Vane thought frantically, *Will I come back to life at the bottom of the river, with rocks tied to my ankles? How long—*

Rough hands lifted him. He was wrapped in sacking and carried. Downstairs, by the feel of the jolting motion. Then he lay motionless, till he heard the sound of a car's motor starting.

"Head for the river," a low voice commanded.

Traffic sounds came to him. Someone muttered, "Hurry up. There's a police car next to us—"

And a siren began to scream ominously.

What was happening? Vane cursed silently, furiously. If he could only move! But no, he could merely lie helpless as the roar of the motor mounted louder and louder and the car jolted more uncomfortably.

"They're catching up . . ."

"Throw the stiff out," somebody suggested. "Under their wheels. That'll stop 'em. If we don't—"

A door-latch clicked. Vane felt himself moving. He fell heavily, rolled over and over, and lay still.

Brakes screeched. Footsteps pounded on the pavement. The gunny-sacking was stripped from Vane's face.

Staring up glassily, he saw a uniformed officer bending over him, dim against a star-sprinkled night sky.

"It's Vane!" the man gasped. "The escaped con!"

He turned, shouting. "Keep on after those mugs. Radio headquarters to send a car out. Tell 'em I got Vane—and he's dead!"

CHAPTER FOUR

The Road to Life

VANE lay on an operating table, a sheet over his naked body, and stared blankly at a bare white ceiling. He could not move. He could not tell the coroner or the medical examiner that he was alive, that an autopsy would be murder, that he had agonizingly felt the cut of a scalpel into his arm, though no blood flowed from the pale-lipped wound.

The coroner, his face partly hidden under a gauze mask, came forward, holding a probe. He bent over Vane and delicately felt around the edges of the jewel on the lawyer's forehead.

"Funny," he said over his shoulder. "I've never seen anything like it. By rights it ought to have killed the man—it goes right through the bone. Maybe it *did* kill him. I can't find any surface wounds on the body."

A deeper voice growled, "Too damn bad the murderers got away. I know Pasqual did this, but I can't pin a thing on him."

Vane realized that Chief of Police Lankershim was speaking.

"And there's something funny about this whole thing, Doc," the official went on. "When Vane walked into my office an hour or two ago—well, I told you what happened, didn't I?"

The coroner's gray eyebrows drew together. Level dark eyes scrutinized the

jewel on Vane's forehead as the medico nodded.

"About Stohm? Yes. He confessed, didn't he?"

Lankershim expelled his breath with an angry sound. "He started to—answered every question I asked him. But he was so bruised up I sent him to the hospital for first aid. And—now he's dead."

"Dead?"

"Poisoned. I don't know how. I'm checking up on the trustees and the internes. One of 'em tied up with Pasqual, I know, and he managed to kill Stohm before the man could sign a confession. And now Vane—"

Lankershim came into the lawyer's range of vision. The hard, seamed face was very tired.

"I feel sorry for the kid. Maybe he was framed, maybe he wasn't. The cards were stacked against him, anyhow. And now he's cooling off on a slab—" The chief's lips tightened. "Go ahead and find out what killed him, Doc. If I can pin this on Pasqual, so help me, I'll send him to the chair."

A scalpel gleamed in the bright white glare. Vane felt a wave of hopeless sickness. His body tingled with expectation of the searing pain of sharp steel.

His body . . . *tingled* . . .

Yes. It felt like—like pins-and-needles, the prickling sensation in a limb when circulation is restored to it after a long time. A pulsating, faint stir, too brief to be called a movement, came . . .

HIS heart! It was beginning to beat again! But already the coroner was placing the point of his scalpel below Vane's sternum, preparing for the incision.

Vane tried desperately to move. He managed to make one eyelid quiver. Neither the medico nor Lankershim noticed. The lawyer threw all his will into a silent, frantic command.

The coroner hesitated, bent again to his task.

Suddenly he threw his arm out in a convulsive gesture. The scalpel flew from his hand and rebounded off the wall, to clatter upon the floor.

Lankershim said, "What the hell—"

"I—funny! I couldn't help it! Some reflex—"

It was no reflex. As life returned to Vane, the power of the Stone from the Stars waxed strong. His heartbeat was distinctly detectable now.

The coroner recovered the scalpel, stared at it, and thrust it into a sterilizer. He donned another pair of rubber gloves, and, with a different scalpel, advanced again upon the corpse.

Then he stopped. His eyes and mouth expanded to their ultimate limits of flexibility. He gurgled inarticulately.

Behind him, Lankershim gasped, "My God! *Look at that!*"

The corpse sat up.

Vane winced, stretched out his arms, and yawned. He swung his feet from the table and sat eying the two astounded men.

The coroner whispered, "You're dead! You're dead!"

Lankershim came out of his trance. He sprang forward.

Vane frowned and said, "Don't move, either of you." His voice was harsh, husky. His throat felt tight and dry.

Water. He needed that, first. Clutching the sheet about him, he went to a cooler in the corner and drank nearly a quart of icy liquid. After that he felt better. He turned to stare at the two men, who were immobile statues.

A warm stickiness on his arm drew his gaze. The incision the coroner had made was beginning to bleed as blood flowed again through Vane's arteries. Luckily, the wound was not deep, and there was adhesive tape in a glass cabinet near by. Gingerly he fingered the jewel on his

forehead. It was still there, chill, glassy, alien.

He thought swiftly. Pasqual was a shrewd, ruthless antagonist, and he himself was not as powerful as he had imagined. These trances might overtake him at any time. Again he felt the tug of painful

hunger. Food was the immediate necessity. He was weak as a cat.

Food—and clothing. Neither the coroner nor Lankershim wore garments large enough to fit Vane's big-boned frame. The lawyer hesitated and finally said, "You'll both wake up in half an hour. Lankershim, I'm going to have a showdown with Pasqual tomorrow morning. At six A. M. I'm going to his office on the East Side. I want you to be there, and I want you to see that Pasqual's there, too. I don't care how you do it, but that's an order. Understand?"

"I understand," Lankershim said dully.

"Swell. Now—I'll need some decent clothes. . . ."

GRAY dawn broke over the East Side. Smoke rose greasily from the chimneys. People rose early in the slums; they had to. Garbage trucks, milk wagons rattled past. Pushcarts were loaded for the day's trade.

In the back of Uncle Tobe's grocery, Steve Vane stood up from the table. Mickey was watching him with awed eyes. The lawyer smiled at the boy.

"Gosh, you can sure stow it away! I never seen a guy eat so much."

Vane pulled the hat lower over his eyes. "I was hungry. Don't wake Uncle Tobe. I'll be seeing you."

He pushed through the curtains, went through the shop, unlocked the front door. He stepped out in the street, and, with a quick glance around, began to walk swiftly southward. It was nearly six A. M. Time for the rendezvous.

Pasqual's office was a dingy, mean little place squeezed in between tenements. Through the glass window Vane could see the squat gangster seated uncomfortably at his desk, shooting occasional glances behind him, where, no doubt, Lankershim was hidden. Vane wondered what means of coercion the chief had used on Pasqual to induce the gangster to keep this appointment. Well, that didn't matter. The lawyer's lips tightened grimly.

He walked into the store. Pasqual shot up from his chair. His hand was hidden in his coat. Vane smiled.

"I'm unarmed," he said.

The gangster's thick lips twisted. He called, "Lankershim! Quick!"

From the back of the office came the sound of hurrying feet. The chief, flanked by four uniformed patrolmen, stepped into view. He walked toward Vane.

"I don't know why I did this," he said. "But I had to, somehow. Vane, you're under arrest. Put up your hands."

Vane said, "All right," and obeyed. He was thinking fast. At a word from him he could force Pasqual to commit suicide. Certainly the gangster deserved death . . .

No. There was another way. But—

Lankershim was walking forward, handcuffs clinking as he held them. "Come on, Vane."

"Wait a minute."

The chief stopped.

Vane looked at Pasqual. The squat gangster still kept his right hand out of sight under his flashy sport coat. His little eyes were fixed on the lawyer. He snarled. "For God's sake, put those cuffs on him!"

"I just wanted to tell you something, Pasqual," Vane said, very softly. "Remember Tony Apollo? Remember how he used to lick the tar out of you when we were kids? Remember how much you hated and feared him? Tony swore to get you, Pasqual, and he never broke his word."

"Apollo's dead," the gang chief lashed out.

"He told me nothing could kill him till he'd kept his last promise."

Pasqual started to reply, but no sound came from the thick lips. The tiny eyes turned toward the door. It was opening, very slowly.

Tony Apollo stood on the threshold.

PASQUAL sucked in his breath sharply. A sound came from his throat. It wasn't intelligible.

Lankershim whispered, "Apollo!" He reached for his gun.

Vane said, "Don't move, Chief." His glance took in the four patrolmen. "Or you either. This is between Pasqual and Tony Apollo."

Pasqual glanced around frantically. His face was a sickly butter-color.

Tony Apollo walked forward.

Pasqual screamed and clawed out his gun. He fired point-blank at the other.

Blood gushed from Apollo's chest. He didn't stop. He ignored the wounds. He kept on walking toward Big Mike Pasqual.

And Big Mike Pasqual wasn't big any more. He was just a terrified little rat, yelling and picking up the telephone from the desk and hurling it at Apollo. The latter's nose was crushed by the impact. The fixed, unchanging smile did not fade.

Tony Apollo kept on walking forward.

Pasqual seized a chair, lifted it, and smashed it down on Apollo's head.

"Keep away from me!" he mouthed. "Damn you, leave me alone! I never framed you! For God's sake, Tony—"

Pasqual picked up a heavy lamp from the desk and used it like a club. He kept hitting again and again at his opponent's face. Apollo didn't try to resist or protect himself. He just stood there, while his features slowly vanished in a mangle of red, pulped flesh.

Tony Apollo came walking on . . . . .

Horrified gasps went up from the crowd outside. Pasqual whirled suddenly and made for the door. He forced his way through the mob, and men and women alike shrank from the hysterical lord of the underworld—now a shaking, shrieking wreck. Pasqual looked over his shoulder.

Tony Apollo was following.

Vane said to Lankershim, "Come on, all of you." He nodded at the officers, and they trailed him out on the sidewalk. Amid the seething crowd, they stared after Pasqual.

The gangster was climbing a fire-escape, in a frantic attempt to escape from his pursuer. Up and up he went, five stories above the ground to the roof. White faces watched him from the tenement's windows. On the summit Pasqual vanished for an instant, and then reappeared, holding in his hands a brick he had wrenched from a crumbling chimney.

Tony Apollo was climbing the fire-escape.

And Tony Apollo wasn't a man any longer. He was a red butchered *Thing* from which blood dripped in a steady stream to the pavement below. The street was filled now with a huge mob; hundreds of eyes were turned up to the roof.

"KEEP away from me! I didn't frame you! Stay back!"

The brick shot down with the force of a bullet. It smashed against Apollo's shoulder. The man's body was torn from its grip. It plummeted down through the air.

Silence, after that a dull, heavy thud. Then, suddenly, Pasqual screamed like a damned soul. For Tony Apollo was getting up, slowly, carefully, and starting to climb the fire-escape again.

Pasqual found more bricks and hurled them down. Some found their mark; some missed. But Apollo did not lose his grip again. He reached the third story— the fourth—the fifth. White faces watched him with horror from the windows. Apollo ignored them.

He had no face. Blood was literally pouring from his body. And he kept on smiling, silently, horribly, as he climbed.

Pasqual suddenly began to scream, "Stop, Tony! I framed you! I framed you! But I'll give everything back—everything! Only don't come any closer—"

Tony Apollo pulled himself over the edge of the roof. He stood up. Pasqual

staggered back, clawing at the air, sobbing hysterically.

Then he fell, and was hidden beyond the parapet of the roof. Tony Apollo fell, too.

Vane turned to Lankershim. "Better send your men up to the roof. I think our friend Pasqual will talk now. If he's still sane . . ."

The chief barked a command. Two officers raced forward, clambered up the fire-escape. After a moment one returned, while the other, carrying Pasqual's limp body, followed more slowly.

The first officer halted before Lankershim. His voice was puzzled.

"Apollo wasn't up there."

"He got away?"

The patrolman swallowed convulsively. "I—I guess so. There wasn't any blood on the roof—"

Lankershim expelled his breath in disbelief. "No blood! Why, the pavement's covered with it. Look!" He pointed—and then his jaw dropped.

There wasn't any blood visible. It had vanished . . .

A MONTH had passed. Vane sat in the back of Uncle Tobe's shop, eating *Hasenpfeffer* with gusto. The old man was smoking a battered corncob and nodding thoughtfully.

"Business is better for everyone now that Pasqual's gang is broken up. He confessed everything, didn't he—how he framed you—everything?"

"That's right."

Uncle Tobe suddenly leaned over the table. "I've been thinking, Steve—they never found Tony Apollo after he disappeared from that roof."

"Probably dead," Vane grunted. "A wonder he kept alive as long as he did."

The grocer smiled. "I have been thinking of various things," he said, apparently at random. "The way you hypnotized Stohm when he knocked over my showcase—and that red stone you used to have on your forehead."

Vane looked up sharply. His face was immobile for an instant. Then, abruptly, he grinned.

"All right," he said. "You saw the jewel, eh?"

"I got a glimpse of it, yes. And now there is a little scar in the center of your forehead—"

"Operation. I'd figured that I'd have to wear that stone till I died, like the original owner. But he wasn't—exactly human." Vane hesitated. "Maybe his race didn't know much about surgery. Maybe their nervous structure was more sensitive. I dunno. An operation removed the jewel, and I'm still alive."

"I see. And what really happened to Tony Apollo?"

"He died the first day after we broke out of prison. Before that, he asked me to get Pasqual for him if he failed. Tony Apollo was a crook and a gangster, but he played square, in his own way. And he never broke a promise."

"But it wasn't Apollo who followed Pasqual up that fire-escape."

Vane smiled grimly. "Pasqual saw him. The Chief saw him. The whole crowd saw him—so did you."

"Yes, I saw him," Uncle Tobe nodded. "But—did you?"

There was a brief silence. Then Vane shook his head.

"No, I didn't see him. He wasn't there, except in the minds of Pasqual and the chief and all the rest. I—well, let's say I used hypnotism." Involuntarily the lawyer's hand went up to the scar on his forehead.

Uncle Tobe tugged at his lower lip. "The red jewel? You still have it? What did you do with it?"

"It's safe," Vane said. "Some day—perhaps—I may be forced to use it again. Anyway—" He picked up his fork "—this *Hasenpfeffer* is swell. How about another helping?"

MONSTER OF THE MOON

THE small bungalow which was Cylvia Kane's home stood dark and silent on the declivity of the Canadian hillside. Trees of the lonely neighborhood arched somberly over it. From his seat at the controls of the little air-roller, with Cylvia, his fiancee, beside him, young John Deering gazed down, puzzled. It was now past midnight—he and Cylvia had been to a theatrical performance in the nearby city—but despite the lateness of the hour there should have been lights in the house.

"Strange," he said. "Dark as a cellar switchtube, Cyl. Even if your servants have all gone to bed, wouldn't you think they'd have left a light for us?"

Cylvia did not answer. She was a slim, exceedingly beautiful, dark-haired girl of twenty—boyish with her flaring bobbed hair, her snug white blouse open at her sleek rounded throat; and her

Betrothed to mortal, promised to the Moon Master, Cylvia Kane goes to her last dread rendezvous with the creature who had fled the world, crying—"I go—but I will come back to claim my bride!"

By RAY CUMMINGS

black and white striped trousers snug down to her small, shiny black shoes. Mute with wonderment, she stared down at her home.

Deering expertly landed the roller on the stage-rack near the house. Queer. The door-slide at the back of the house was wide open.

Cylvia gripped his arm. "What's that, John? Look!"

A small, dark rectangular blob lay there on the rocky ground beside the path. It was a suitcase belonging to one of the servants. Partly burst open, it lay as though hastily discarded by someone in flight. Cylvia clung to the stalwart Deering as they entered the dark house. Strange, this unnatural silence, this darkness.

The girl switched on the lights.

"Well," Deering muttered, "looks as though they had decamped."

The little house showed no signs of disorder, but Mr. and Mrs. Smithers, and their young daughter who was the serving maid, were gone. Had they been frightened away? There were signs of hasty packing of essential belongings—the belongings in the discarded suitcase.

"John! Oh John, come here! Read this!"

It was Cylvia's voice, calling from the living room. Deering joined her, where she was standing at the news ticker-tape. During their absence it had printed a few paragraphs—words strung on the narrow paper ribbon, printed by the teletype mechanism. The white ribbon trembled in Cylvia's hands as she held it spread out under the overhead tube-light.

"John, look! This news report—9:10 tonight."

Silently he scanned the long line of words:

"Mt. Forrest Observatory . . . Strange object seen outside Earth's stratosphere . . . A tiny cylindrical object with a comet tail behind it was observed at 8:50 this evening through the new reflecting electro-telescope of the Mt. Forrest Observatory. A brief glimpse, obscured almost at once by intervening clouds. Distance possibly eight thousand miles. A descending object, dropping toward Eastern Canada. A vehicle arriving from Interplanetary Space? Mt. Forrest observer reports its aspects similar to rumored experimental ship of the missing Ralph Goff, seven years ago. . . ."

"WELL," Deering murmured. Blankly he gazed at Cylvia; her obvious terror was astonishing. "Cylvia, what the devil—"

"That Ralph Goff," she gasped. "You—you've heard of him, John?"

Deering had, of course. The thing had happened seven years ago, when Deering had been a lad of seventeen. He had read, at that time, of Ralph Goff. A man of about forty; a crackpot, eccentric fellow who had gotten notoriety writing vitriolic assaults on mankind. He had been more or less a hermit, hating his fellow man—a misogynist, with weird ideas that he would like to start a hermit cult of others like himself. Deering remembered how the press and newscasters had jibed at Goff. And Goff had retorted that of all living creatures on Earth, the human race was the most villainous, the most murderous. His theory was that animals were superior in morals, in all ethics of conduct; even in latent intelligence.

"Sure I remember him," Deering was murmuring. "But Cylvia—what's it to you?"

"Oh John, I knew him. I was only thirteen then. He came to see father—to get father's financial backing in some wild scheme to establish a colony of animals—to breed them, train them, to bring out their latent intelligence. To 'give them a chance,' that's what he said. And

then he said, 'Some day animals will rule the world.' "

Blankly Deering stared at her. He recalled too, that there had been rumors that Goff, who had been a scientist, was working to discover the secret of space-flight; that he was building a little space-rocket cylinder. And mysteriously both Goff and his apparatus had disappeared. If he had discovered the secret of space-flight, quite evidently he had used it to leave this Earth, which he hated, rather than share his secret for the benefit of mankind. . . .

"But Cylvia," Deering was murmuring, "you're thinking now, if this Goff has come back—that he might look for you—come here—"

She nodded. "Oh John—I can remember the way he looked at me—my terror of him. He was—he was so—"

The frightened words died in her throat. In the heat of the summer night, Deering had thrown open one of the window slides. The window here in the silent living room was a pallid rectangle from the moonlight outside. Was there a weird shadow there, for a second blotting out the moonlight? Deering thought so; thought he saw the moving blur of something monstrous . . . something unhuman—a flat head with a great bird-like beak.

But in that second it was gone. Cylvia gasped in terror, with a sucking intake of breath. "Oh John—something—something stalking us—"

Certainly the stalwart, husky young Deering was no coward. But nevertheless, a sudden chilling shudder was stabbing at him. He was unarmed; no weapons were here in the lonely little bungalow.

"Quiet!" he murmured. He reached, snapped out the light and the room sprang into darkness, with just the pallid sheen from the window. He stood with his arm around Cylvia as she shuddered against him. And then he heard it—they both heard, unmistakable, the sound of a weird croaking voice. And a queer flapping beat—like giant wings?

At the window, Deering stared out into the pallid darkness. There was a small rocky area under the trees beyond the window, with a little thirty-foot cliff nearby. Something was on top of the cliff—a round blob perhaps the size of a man. Moonlight was on it—monstrous round thing, with a beak. Its eyes were staring down at the house. Then in that instant, it launched itself awkardly out into the air. A giant bird? Its stubby wings flapped. But they couldn't support it, merely checked its awkward flopping fall so that in another second or two it landed with a plop on the rocks.

Some weird monstrous bird? The thing leaped to its feet, for a second stared at the house. Horror was within the stricken, peering young Deering as he crouched with Cylvia at the window. The ghastly thing out there at the edge of the moonlight seemed to have a dark cloak partly enveloping it. And suddenly, with what seemed an arm and hand, it wrapped the cloak more closely around itself, and ran diagonally toward the house, ducking into a tree shadow, where it vanished.

"My God!" Deering muttered. "Cylvia—we've got to get out of here."

Out the window, and run—try and reach their little air-roller. . . . Deering had some such instinctive idea. But too late! Dimly he was aware of a sound in the dark room behind them. Cylvia screamed. A monstrous figure was here in the dark living room! Another was behind it— ghastly stalking shapes which quite evidently had come in through the rear door of the house. Deering had no time to do more than jump to his feet. Something whizzed through the air, crashed on his head so that all the world seemed to burst into roaring white light.

He seemed to hear Cylvia screaming as his senses faded. . . .

DEERING at last came to himself with the feeling that a long time had passed. He was lying on a mattress, in what seemed a small cubby room. Light came from a small bull's-eye window—strange, pallid light, mellow, yellow-red. Stars blazed out there in a firmament of black. He was on a spaceship! He could hear, and feel, the dim throb of its mechanisms; the sucking whirr of air-renewers and ventilators—and the hiss of rocket-streams.

Abruptly a door-slide behind him opened, and soundlessly slid closed as a figure came into the cubby. Deering, with his head still roaring, tried to get up on one elbow as he blankly peered. It was an upright thing some six feet high. Man, beast or bird? He could not guess. The round blob of body supported by its two jointed legs was blue-feathered, with squat, powerful-looking wings, folded now under the dark cloak which loosely hung from its spindly neck. There was a face—a giant, rigid, beak, with little gleaming eyes above it.

It came forward with little mincing, hopping steps. And then Deering saw that it had short, jointed arms dangling under the cloak. Breathless, tense with horror, Deering stared as the thing came and bent over him. Monstrous bird-face; but somehow there was a weird intelligence in the glowing eyes. Then the foot-long beak opened. A cawing voice said:

"You—better now? You will not to die?" English! The travesty of human voice which a giant parrot might have! But there was certainly more intelligence behind those staring eyes!

"You—you can talk?" Deering gasped. Then with a rush of horrified memory he thought of Cylvia. "There was a girl

(Continued on page 132)

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with me? Damn you—what did you do with her?"

"She—all right. No you worry—no need." Was that indescribable face grinning? The pink skin crinkled under the little green, glowing eyes. The ghastly bill-mouth stayed open. "I am the Lunite, Lahgg." One of the jointed arms came up, with prehensile, parrot-like claws which tapped the feathered chest. "Lahgg—important one."

"You take me to that girl, Cylvia," Deering said. "She is here on board?"

"Yes. But cannot—take you—for you stay here. The Great Master-Man—he is on board—tells me, keep you here—"

Deering's mind was racing. A Lunite? They were on their way, then, to the Moon? Through the bull's-eye window now, from his changed position, he could see, out in the black firmament, a great mellow crescent. The Earth! And a pallid, streaming light from the other direction, which doubtless was the approaching Moon. The Great Master-Man? Could that be the villainous Ralph Goff?

"Sit down," Deering offered. This thing—this Lunite, Lahgg—weird creature, but Deering could not miss its intelligence. The cawing, hideous voice—that was the physical limitations of its bird-like vocal apparatus; and the limping English—a language newly learned.

LAHGG was willing to talk—grotesque feathered shape squatting beside Deering. And Deering listened, with an occasional question, piecing together the broken phrases and with his own imagination filling in the gaps. Upon the far side of the Moon—that side always unseen by Earthmen—in a giant, cauldron-like depression of the satellite, atmosphere was gathered. Like a great irregular-shaped sea, two

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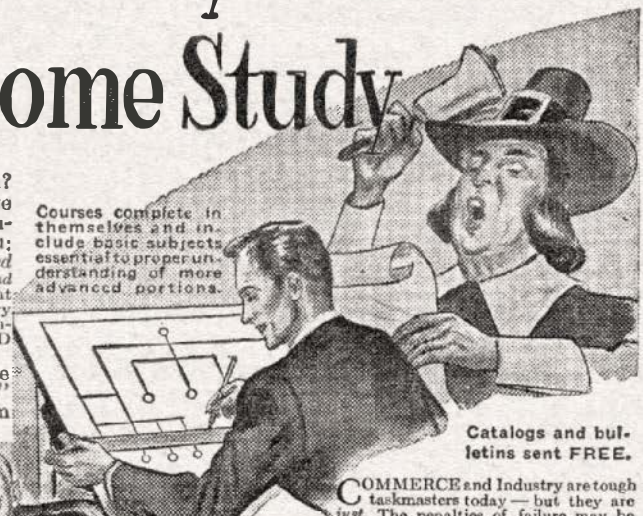

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hundred miles in length and width, and three or four miles deep. An area peopled by a single species—these weird Lunites. This Lahgg now described himself as one of the most intelligent of his kind. Perhaps it was a boast—or perhaps they were a moronic bird-people, living free as birds in the trees of their forest, for with the slighter gravity of the Moon their squat wings enabled them to fly awkwardly.

And into this, a human from Earth had come, organizing them, teaching them, showing them better, more complex ways to live.

"We—bird-animals," Lahgg was saying proudly. "Much better than Earth human-men. More smart. More—he say moral. Human-people bad—"

Surely it was the misogynist Ralph Goff—he who had hated his fellow man—who had taught Lahgg this. Deering stared at the weird, beaked face. The skin was crinkled into little folds under the eyes, the great bill was grotesquely parted. It was as though the creature were grinning—ironically grinning.

"Your Master brought you on this trip to Earth?" Deering prompted.

"Yes. Our world he rules—his little Empire, see? Him, one human. No enough—so this trip—we get girl, you understand?" Abruptly Lahgg stood up, balancing on his spindly brown legs. "I bring for you food."

"You take me to that girl," Deering insisted. He tried to stand up, but he was still weak and dizzy and sank back.

Surely that was an ironic grin on Lahgg's monstrous face. "You do what Lahgg says," he commanded. "You only a human—kill you if bad. You third human for Lunite world. Master says—you slave. Very good for working—much work to do, building life like human-people."

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Deering stared as the weird Lunite creature slid the door-panel and was gone. Unquestionably the beaked, grotesque face was stamped with irony—a ghastly, leering grin that stabbed Deering with a shudder. . . .

The remainder of the brief spaceflight was a blur to John Deering. Perhaps he was being kept drugged by the villainous Goff; he never knew. He ate the strange food which Lahgg brought; drank the liquids at intervals. Vaguely, once or twice amid the throb and hiss of the space-ship mechanisms, he could hear other cackling, cawing voices; once also the gruff voice of a man. And once he thought that he heard Cylvia. . . .

Rounding the Moon . . . Deering, at last recovered, stood at his bull's-eye window gazing down at the gleaming pallid spread of Lunar surface now only a few thousand miles beneath the rocket-ship. Great jagged spires with sunlight and Earthlight on them . . . Familiar surface at which now he was gazing aslant. There was the giant circular Tycho; and Copernicus. . . .

Then, hours later, a new surface was spread down there. Still giant peaks, tipped with slanting sunlight. He could see that twilight and a crescent purple area of night stretched ahead. . . . Then, in the twilight, as the little rocket-ship dropped lower, the tumbled spread of a turgid atmosphere, lying heavy in the vast moon-hollow, came in view; and presently they were into it. Then through it—down into a twilight region. Tense, Deering stared at the lush, weird forest that presently was spread a thousand feet under the dropping, slanting ship. Gnarled, fantastic giant trees of seemingly porous vegetation were tangled into a jungle mass. Great blue and red vines interlaced them—vines with monstrous air-pods and huge flowers of vivid

hue. . . . Off in the distance there was a thread of pallid river. Then it seemed that Deering saw things bobbing in the trees, or scurrying on the ground; the strange, wild Lunites, staring up at the vehicle as it passed. . . .

"You come now—I take you. We land." Deering swung at the voice of Lahgg behind him.

Arrival . . . Deering had been docile, while Lahgg bound his crossed wrists behind him. Whether the Lunite was armed or not he had never been able to determine; but it was obvious that any resistance would bring death—not only to him, but to Cylvia. The little ship now seemed a bustle of activity. Deering saw none of it. Lahgg herded him into a dim, tiny cross-corridor where stood an outer pressure slide. Then the ship landed. Through a bull's-eye beside him, Deering could see a dim vista of twilit forest. Weird scrambling blobs of creatures were out there. Then some other door of the ship had opened. For a second he caught a tense, anguished glimpse of Cylvia—a squat, cloak-enveloped man walking beside her, leading her away, with half a dozen of the grotesque Lunites hopping after them.

"Now—we go," Lahgg said. "I take you to Master-Man's home."

WORLD of the Moon. Deering had only a brief sight of it. . . . A little winding path through the fantastic lacery of brush; spindly giant trees, heavy with pods and monster flowers . . . Figures of peering Lunites crowded him and his guard; blobs of the birdlike forms hopping in the brush for a better view. And they were also overhead, running on the rope-vines, hopping from one limb to another. The forest was noisy with their cawing, jabbering cries in the weird, Lunite animal language. Staring up, Deering saw their dwellings—

thatched mounds, woven of dried vines and leaves, primitive as huge birds' nests. . . .

Then presently the glade opened into a patch of undulating area of soil, with a little thread of river beyond it and the sullen heavy clouds close overhead. The Master-Man's dwelling! It was a sprawled, patched one-story building, seemingly of porous log-struts, walled with monstrous dried leaves bound with vines. But curiously it had a semblance of human habitation—a peaked roof; windows, each shrouded with a huge dried leaf; a door, and a little front veranda set pathetically askew.

Goff, the Emperor! Hater of mankind—so that there was nothing here which had come from Earth. Yet strangely he seemed to have wanted that this dwelling should be in human fashion. . . . And a little beyond it there were two or three others, smaller, now only partially built. And Deering saw too where, at a little distance past the huddled buildings, there was a field of soil where human food was growing.

Flickering torchlight showed in the doorway for which Lahgg was heading. They went through it, into a torch-lit room of crude, Earth-style rustic furniture, draped with the monster leaves.

"So, John Deering. Welcome to Lunaria." It was a heavy, guttural voice from a shadow of the room. Deering whirled. "I am Ralph Goff, once of Earth. Surely you have heard of me?"

A madman? Mad scientific genius? Was he that? This fantastic little house, even the man's ironic drawing of the word Lunaria, suggested it. Deering was stabbed with a shudder as he stared at the strange figure before him. Ralph Goff. A man of forty odd, with long, tangled, matted black hair and a full black beard. He was heavy-set; wide-shouldered, deep-chested; no more than

five feet tall, with thick, dangling, gorilla-like arms. Monstrous gargoyle shape. One shoulder was higher than the other, with a lump behind it. Under the huge beard obviously his face was ugly. He wore no Earth-clothes — disdainful of them, so that now he was dressed in a robe of plaited dried vine-frabric. Like a toga it draped his misshapen form. A wide belt was around his waist, with flash-weapons clipped to it. Those weapons at least were from Earth. The symbol of his power here.

"So?" he murmured again. "You stare, but you do not speak. Are you witless, John Deering?"

"What do you want of me?" Deering demanded. "Where is Cylvia Kane? I want—"

"My slave who questions me—and so quickly has wants? How amusing! Cylvia Kane is unharmed. Why should I harm her—she whom I have picked to share my little empire—my world?" His burning, deep-set eyes clung to Deering. Madman of course—but mad, like so many others, only with his dreams—his lust to rule. Queer, twisted mentality, this misogynist with his hatred of his fellow man — his contempt — his weird belief that animals, beasts and birds, are superior. Beliefs, and lust perhaps born of his own twisted little body—a complex of inferiority. Weird trick of fate that enabled him to leave Earth, and stumble here upon these Lunite creatures whom he could rule.

"My little empire," he was saying. "You see its beginning, Deering? Myself and my Queen—the beginning of my little human dynasty. Interesting, isn't it? Who would ever suppose, back on Earth, that the despised Ralph Goff would rise to such heights as this? A world of his own to rule. Thousands of his loyal subjects, to be taught by him until they are superior to all the damna-

ble Earthmen who ever lived! Queer, isn't it? But it was my destiny—"

His hand was toying now with one of his jeweled little flash-guns. It made Deering's heart pound. . . . Was he about to be killed out of hand?

"THAT girl—Cylvia Kane," Deering began carefully. "If I could see her—"

"But why not? She is here. In a few moments she will be given robes for the ceremony. You shall watch it, Deering—you who think you love her. Is that it?" His deep-set eyes gleamed; his lips snarled back as he ripped out the words. And then his voice ironically again was drawling, "My presentation of their queen to the Lunites—Ralph Goff, their human emperor, and his human queen. You shall see the ceremony, Deering. . . . You Lahgg—you take him outside now, where he can watch. But guard him carefully, Lahgg."

"Yes, Master." On Lahgg's monstrous birdlike face again Deering saw that strange leering look of irony.

Goff clapped his hands suddenly. "You, Meeta!" he called. "Come here!"

There was no answer. At the windows, and at the door, other bird-figures were crowding now, cawing, jabbering. Goff stared at them. Then he called again: "Meeta, come here!"

A Lunite appeared. A female, doubtless, with puffed, smaller feathered body and a top-knot of feathers above the flat upper curve of the head. A sudden wild fury was upon Goff that he had been kept waiting. "The Human-Master calls and you do not come!" he rasped.

"But Master, I was—"

"Silence!" Goff's hand at his belt suddenly snapped out a length of steel whipcord. He lashed it through the air with a skilled stroke so that it caught

the creature, Meeta, across the face. Her cawing cry was a scream of pain.

Goff rasped, "Is my queen, the little human Cylvia, dressed and ready?"

"Yes, Master—almost."

"Then go back to her, and next time when you are called, come quickly."

The little Lunite retreated. At the windows the others were weirdly muttering; but as Goff gazed at them they hopped back into the outer darkness. Smouldering rebellion.

"You, Lahgg," Goff rasped, "take our slave now so that he may see my triumph. You have an Earth-knife?"

"Yes, Master."

"If he gives you any trouble, I have taught you how the knife may be used to stab into his chest?"

"Yes, Master."

Shuddering, Deering had no recourse but to let himself be led from the house. If only he could get his hands free. . . . This Lahgg—all these weird Moon-creaturies—seemed flimsy, fragile. If he could get loose—perhaps get that knife which Lahgg was now gripping.

Preparations for the ceremony. . . . The little forest glade now was springing into torchlight as the excited Lunites assembled. Several hundred of them on the slope of the glade, strung in a crescent facing the house of the Master.

At a point in the lush forest glade some two hundred feet from Goff's dwelling, Lahgg paused. "We wait here," he said. "You watch—very important—human queen for us Lunites—"

Deering stood docile, but he was tense, alert. Another huge Lunite had quietly come and was standing with him and Lahgg—another guard with a gleaming steel Earth-knife in his taloned hand. Then suddenly a great cawing chorus of cries welled out through the torch-lit forest. At the door of Goff's dwelling the Master had appeared, with Cylvia

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beside him. Deering stood with his heart seeming to pound in his throat as he stared. Cylvia, her slim, pink-white little body garbed now in a brief drape of red-blue dried fibre. Beautiful little wood-nymph. A garland of vivid flowers was set like a crown on her head. There was terror on her pallid face.

Beside Deering his Lunite guard stood close, watchful. But now Lahgg had vanished. Goff was leading Cylvia from the house, toward where a little rustic platform had been erected for a throne-dais. The awed crowd was silent, watching. And then Deering saw Lahgg. He had appeared behind Goff and Cylvia—Lahgg stealthily moving toward them. The torchlight gleamed on his face, weirdly contorted now with his little eyes blazing. And the torchlight gleamed on the naked knife-blade in his hand. Murderous Lahgg! With a leap of horror, Deering realized it. Ghastly, ironic commentary on all living creatures—this little Empire, with work introduced into it, so that the Lunites were smouldering with rebellion and resentment. And here was one of them, this Lahgg, taught by the human Goff so that Lahgg himself now was lusting to rule. Lahgg to be the Master here—to dominate his fellow creatures in the fashion of mankind!

THE terrible thing happened so quickly that Deering for a moment was stricken into confusion. Goff and Cylvia were mounting the dais. One of the Lunite females, awkwardly attending Cylvia, suddenly incurred Goff's anger. He struck at her, brought from her a cry of fear and pain. It was like a spark thrown into gunpowder. The crowding Lunites abruptly were cawing with anger; milling forward. One of them, with its great beak, pecked at Goff from behind. He whirled; his hand flicked to his belt, came back with a little

flash-gun. Its bolt spat; the Lunite fell.

A spark in gunpowder. Within a second the throng of bird-creatures was wildly milling forward with cackling, angry cries. Lahgg had jumped, but now Goff saw him—saw his stabbing blade. Goff's little gun spat again — stabbed through Lahgg who tumbled forward, sprawled at Goff's feet. . . .

All within a few seconds. Then Deering was aware that the guard beside him had dropped his torch and fled. The spluttering, still-lighted torch lay here on the ground. Deering flung himself down, shifted backward. The torch flame burned into his hands and wrists—a moment of agonized burning flesh and then the dried vine-rope burned and came loose.

With giant leaps, here with the slight moon-gravity, Deering made for the plat-

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form. A wildly cawing group of Lunites got in front of him. He leaped over them—sailing, twenty foot bound—and landed beside Cylvia; caught her up in his arms.

"Oh—Oh John—thank God—"

"The spaceship!" he gasped. "If we can get to it—"

HE set her down, and she ran with him, giant sailing leaps, hand in hand. The little ship at the edge of the glade stood dark, momentarily deserted. At its opened door they turned to look back. Goff was still fighting. He had climbed to the summit of a small rock around which the angry creatures were milling, trying to leap up at him. And suddenly his last little flash-gun was exhausted. He flung it away; stood for a moment poised, with the torchlight painting him. And Deering saw his face. Amazement, disillusionment stamped his features as he faced the wreck of his little empire. . . . Everywhere the grotesque Lunites were running wild. They had fired Goff's flimsy dwelling; yellow-red flames were leaping from it. The other half-finished houses were burning. . . . Weird, milling throng of Lunite creatures—they had tried man's life, and now they were destroying it . . . repudiating it. . . .

Wreck of an empire. For that second Goff stared at it. Then, with a last despairing cry, he hurled himself down from

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(Continued)

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the rock, and the raging creatures leaped upon him—like vultures, pecking, clawing, pulling him apart. . . .

"Oh John, hurry! Here they come!"

A group of the Lunites surged now at the spaceship. Deering shoved Cylvia inside—barely in time as the weird creatures hurled themselves wildly at the closed spaceship door.

Then with hissing rocket-streams, the small ship lifted, slanted upward.

The little spaceship slanted higher. A pall of smoke was settling down there now in the glade—turgid, black shroud to hide the ghastly scene of tragedy and death. . . . And overhead, out beyond the Moon clouds, amid the stars, the huge Earth hovered. Silently Cylvia and Deering stared up at it—great mellow disk of Earth, like a soft gentle beacon calling them home.

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