

THE NAKED TRUTH! ATOM WAR By Rog Phillips

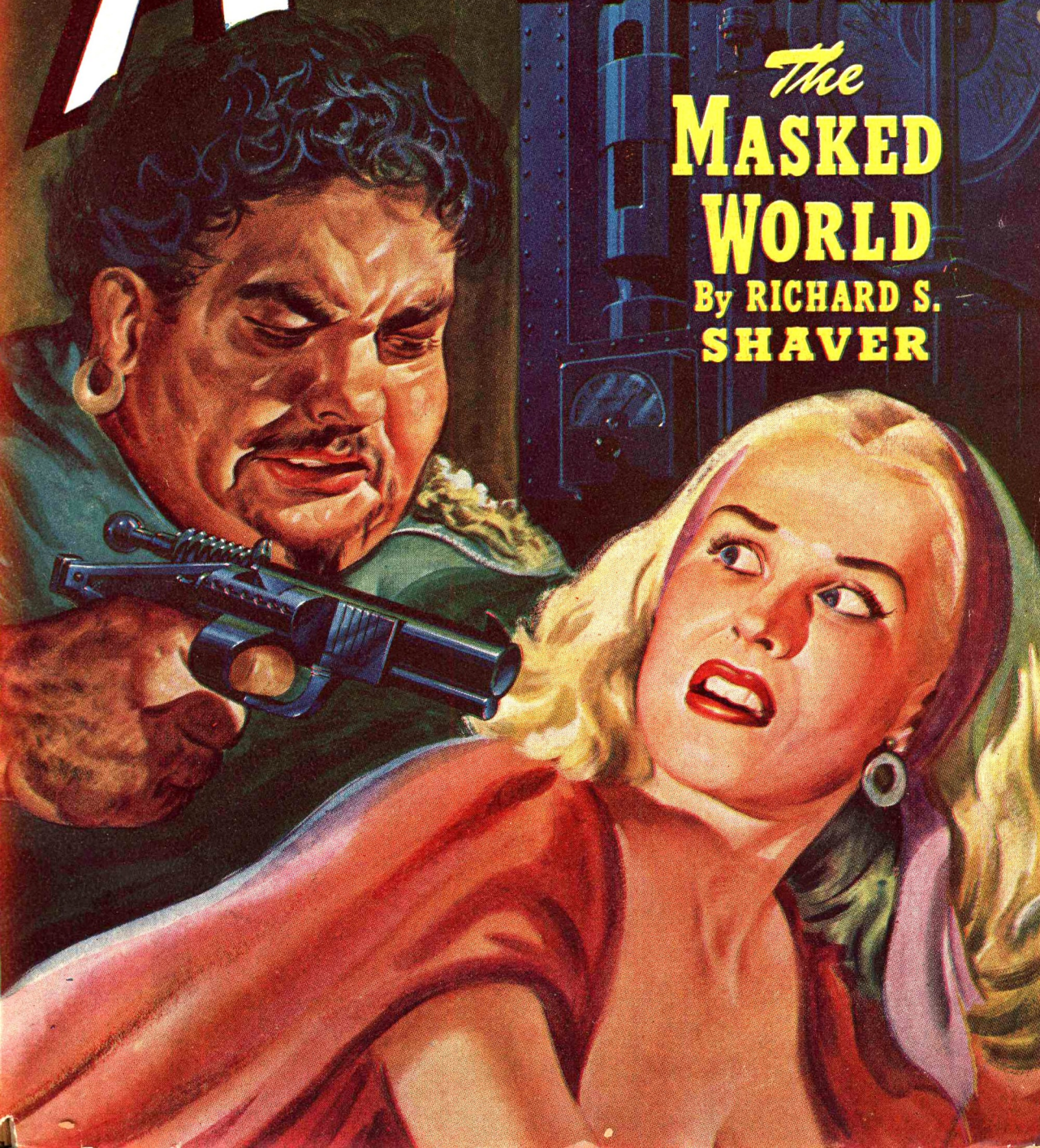
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# AMAZING

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## STORIES

*The*  
**MASKED  
WORLD**  
By RICHARD S.  
SHAVER





# MEET *the* AUTHORS

Rog Phillips, Author of "Atom War"



Rog Phillips

THE atom bombs that put "period" to the Second World War gave Rog Phillips the title for his story in this issue of AMAZING STORIES. "Atom War" although it can be classed as only one more of the many stories about the atom which have flooded the country, is in a class by itself because of the fact that the atom itself is not the real story told in this yarn. This yarn tells the story of Mr. Average American, and what the atom will mean to him—and further, it enters into that classification that such men as Nostradamus, Cudworth and St. John hold as prophets . . . with one difference, there is no beating around the bush and making with the symbolism.

Rog Phillips is a strange man. And yet he's liked by his friends because he's such an ordinary, likeable fellow, with no frills and feathers. He's on the shady side of thirty, old enough to know better, and we think he does. He's tall, husky, and was working as a welder in a shipyard when we found out he could write. He's married, lives in Kirkland, Washington, has a dog and a cat trained to do tricks, and worries about the termites who are eating away at

the foundations of his house. But he's not really a writer! His forte is mathematics, which is where the strange part of Mr. Phillips comes in. Why should a guy so smart want to write slam-bang science fiction stories? Well, we give up—but we're thankful that he does, because this is a darn fine yarn.

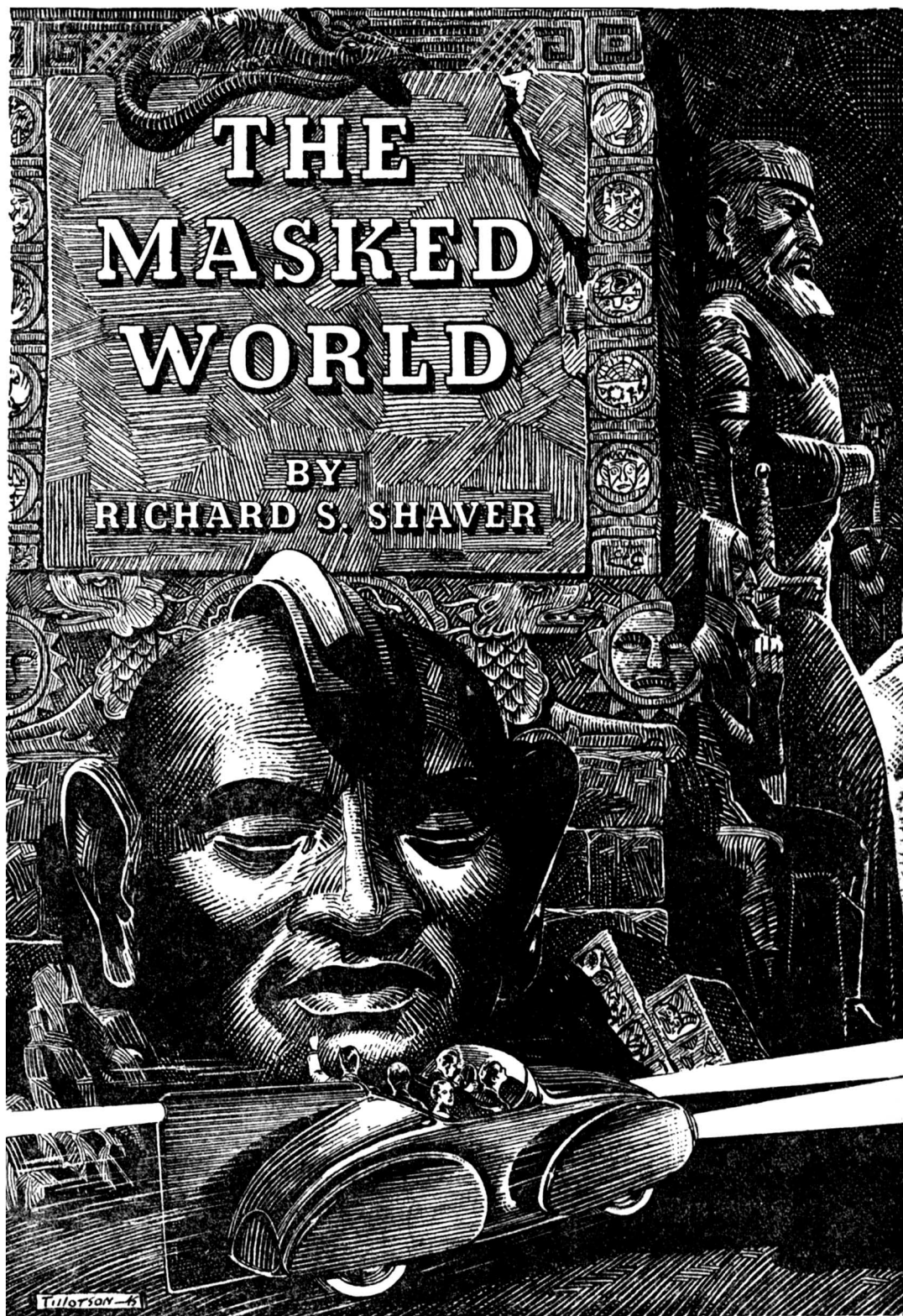
Before he began writing for Ziff-Davis, Mr. Phillips had not written anything at all. His first manuscript was something called "Murder in a Macaroni Factory," which has not yet been published. We got a laugh out of it, but saw immediately that beyond his propensity to disagree with Webster on matters of spelling, he had a certain deft way of expressing himself in words. After all, writing fiction is the art of using words, and not particularly big ones. Thus, we urged him to try some of his theories on a story of the future.

Mr. Phillips paid us a visit, and we discovered that he is something of a philosopher, in addition to being rather a dreamer and idealist. He has strong ideas about the future of the American people, and the destiny of Democracy. He believes science has done a particularly bad job of handling its discoveries after they have been discovered. In plain words, those of our readers who believe scientists should form at last an equal part of our governing body will agree with his theories as to the handling of such things as the atom bomb.

Mr. Phillips is active in local social affairs, and has a firm belief in the old adage that the best way to be peaceful is to go around with a big grin on your face and make friends with everybody you contact. In fact, he complains that his social activities continually take him away from work he knows he ought to do.

He is a graduate of Gonzaga University, and also studied at the University of Washington. After graduation, he went to work, forgetting all he had learned largely because he wondered if it were all just hearsay or not. While he worked, he scribbled on odd bits of papers, and the scribbling was always numbers. He says the answers he got confirmed his suspicion that knowledge is just something that seems to fit the most known circumstances at any particular moment, and the smart man would change them to suit the moment without any qualms. He says scientists today are doing that all over the world. His ambition is to be a scientist some day, and to that end he has built himself a small workshop where he puts together gadgets suggested to him by his mathematics.













# THE MASKED WORLD

By RICHARD S. SHAVER

**An incredible revelation of  
the world of horror hidden  
beneath modern New York;  
the caverns of the dero**

**"SEVENTEEN DIE, ONE HUNDRED INJURED IN PASSENGER WRECK!"**

*Second part of Great Northern Empire Builder plows into first part of train at Michigan, North Dakota. . . ."*

That came over my radio at two o'clock on the morning of Aug. 10. I returned to my typewriter resolved that this time I would really lift the veil from the mad cavern world called "The Masked World."

I know what caused the wreck. I know that many a high-placed man in America knows too just what caused that wreck and many another like it—and sheer craven fear keeps them from telling the world. Well, Shaver is not afraid to tell you why the Great Northern Empire Builder plowed into the forward part of the train on the morning of Aug. 10.

Under that part of North Dakota lies a great cavern highway. It is a highway that stretches clear across Pennsylvania to New York City. In the other direction it reaches nearly to the Colorado without a break. Under that wreck—which happened over a temporarily deserted stretch of this highway, the ancient, time-forgotten underworld road—a vehicle that looks somewhat like a modern living trailer is parked, under the loom of a great machine. This machine is shaped like a tremendous hu-

man figure with six arms. (Machines of the ancients were often built in sculptural forms; why I don't know.)

Beside the mighty, enigmatic work of a machine art long lost on earth, a little cooking fire gleams. Beside the fire squats a small four-limbed monstrosity. If we look closely his resemblance to man becomes apparent. He is human, a very degenerate human, son of the degenerate nomads of the caverns. There are many of his kind, but thank God, not too many.

His ancient rolling home is a living-rolat, a vehicle used by the ancients for just that purpose for which he is using it—a rolling home. It is driven by a motor that requires only an occasional quart of water for fuel. Built of the imperishable metal which the ancients used so universally that much of their work still survives in the hot dry air of the caves, the rollats still roll over the hidden highways; though their passengers and drivers are distinctly *not* the God race that built the roads and the vast machine civilization. I will describe the little ghoul and his relation to the wreck of the passenger train will get clearer.

His name is Max, and he has grown up in the wild bands of gypsy-like marauders who make life in the caves so hazardous. Stopping by the statue to cook his meal, he had turned the studs



in the bottom of the great machine. A round screen that was part of the base of the statue had glowed into life, and the beam that shot up from its vast forehead penetrated the two miles of rock overhead and revealed the Empire Builder, overhead on its way through the night.

This particular little ghoulish had developed an alleviant for his frequent periods of aloneness, an exciting little trick of wrecking trains. He indulged this penchant whenever chance offered. With the many diverse beams of power built into such intricate old machines by the masterminds of the ancients, and learned by the ghoulish through the years of contact with the wandering, wild and frequently wholly evil groups in the caverns' vastnesses (and by his continual poking and prying at the levers and buttons activating the old mech) he soon had the signals set far ahead of the flying train. With a black "shorter" ray he silenced the red signals along the track by shorting the wires feeding the current to the bulbs (it is a conductive ray that grounds any electric it touches—like the Grindell-Mathews ray). It was not stopped nor impeded by the miles of solid rock above Max's head, for like radio waves it was wholly penetrative. Other similar rays can be used to send current into a light that is supposed to be shut off. Thus the signals for the train were reversed by the evil, little ghoulish.

The engineer, seeing the all clear signals, plowed at full speed into the forward half of the two-part train, for Max had carefully reversed the lights for this half of the train, and the engineer was chafing at the red lights that seemed to have permanently decided that time did not matter. Max loved this little trick, and had perhaps a half dozen trains to his credit.

There are many others like Max!

Seventeen men died to please the mad little nomad of the caverns; and he laughed and laughed, for he considered this proved that he, Max, the despised of the cavern peoples, was wiser and more clever than the great people overhead. He hated them! What pleasure it was to play the telaug beam over the struggling people as the great weights of the heavy passenger coaches rose on end and fell, crushing, pinning and smashing the people to a bloody mess. Yes, he would wreck many more trains before he was through.

And he will! And many men besides myself know of such things, and cannot tell—or will not—for fear of ridicule.

MAX shut off the power in the mech within the great sculpture, wondering idly as he did so why the old ones had built the machines into great statues that looked like giant people with many arms and great luminous eyes. Remembering that the trader in Ontal would give him food supplies to fill the food bins in his roll at home for jewels like these that gleamed in the great idol's head—he crawled painfully up the smooth limbs of the statue and pryed out the eyes. That they were gems worth a great deal more than he would get for them from the trade store, he knew—but what could he do about it? The big-shots had the trade sewed up tight.

Crawling down, Max washed perfunctorily and unsuccessfully at the little streams of water that still played from a stone girl that was a fountain beside the highway, grinned a rotten-toothed grin at his own cleverness, climbed like an evil crab into the great machine that was his rolling home. He had to use several great cushions to reach the giant's steering wheel, and adjusting these, he set out.



Max was on his way to the feast of the Sabbath in mighty old Ontal—a long, long way from North Dakota. Max belonged to a cult of satanists that was as old in the caverns as was history on the surface. Every year, in Ontal, the great city under New York, the Cult members would be feted by the leader of the Cult of the Dark One. It was a yearly event which every nomad attended because it was almost the only time they could enter the city with safety—for at that time safe-conduct was guaranteed by the Cult Leader.

There they were feted by the men who profited most from the use of the organization to their evil ends, and there every sadistic instinct of the hereditary character of some groups of the cavern wights was gratified.

Naturally, everyone knew that the custom of bringing gifts of great value for the great god of Evil was the real reason for the survival of the yearly feast, but where evil pleasure is so lavishly dispensed as it was at the feast of the Devils, the toll was no objection. No real devil could resist the annual feast of Satan. The rulers of the palace of the "Stem" had for two centuries, here in the new world (and for no-one knows how many centuries in the Old Country) counted on the feast of Satan to replenish their coffers, and they were never disappointed. What was the painful death of a few slaves and a stolen babe or two beside the pile of golden objects and jem-set articles the anticipation of the Cultists made them bring from the hidden, lost treasure stores in the uncharted caves?

Max's eyes glittered with anticipation as his mind conjured up the scenes of last year's feast; when the blood-dabbled body of the priestess arose from her prostrate position as the altar before the Red Statue and the great metal body of the old God of Evil it-

self had arisen and pursued her fleeing form amorously about the Hall in the dance of the Love Death; when the girl on the cross began to drip blood down upon the feasters; when the great red metal God took the priestess in his arms before them all; and when the great stim beam spread over the whole hall and they all writhed in insupportable ecstasy, all together, slave girls and wild nomads. Mad women from the Mexican caverns with madder witches from the far north, nomads from the western states, and the fat little hermaphrodite things from the southwest, the dark men of the West clan; all the varied and mad life in the caverns that served the devil. All writhed together under the terrible ecstatic strength of the super-stim that is the most powerful nerve ray on earth. "Roll, wheels!" thought Max. "Soon I will again see the scenes that delight the evil heart as do no others."

Driving all night and the next day along the roads thru solid rock that are not equalled by all our vaunted modern science or even approached in excellence—Max drew nearer and nearer to subterranean New York.

## CHAPTER II

### The City of Ontal

**W**ITHIN the dense archean basalt that upholds our modern surface U.S.A.—deep within the solidity of dark rock where no water can ever penetrate, lies a city. It is not so well known as modern New York directly overhead, but it has its friends, its enemies, and its slums—its lords and plutocrats. It is a part of the ancient, forgotten underworld, not entirely unknown to surface man, but unrecognized as a terrible truth, a harmful factor, of his life. Ontal is a part of the civiliza-



tion under our feet that is called "The Masked World" by those who know.

The underworld is an intricate maze of many levels of titanic caverns which reach everywhere under the surface of our modern surface world. But under New York the ancient highways that are in reality all part of one vast old planet-city that the earth once was before it had a sun—here the ancient highways converge into a greater city of dwellings than anywhere else in the east. Once this city was called "Bakt" by the ancients—but the part that is lived in today is called Ontal after certain great works in it by that ancient name. It is this city which Max approaches in his big old rollat.

Lately this lived-in part of the ancient underworld is called "Bonur's hole." Those who have brains enough to hate the men who rule the great, gloomy tomb in the last ten years have named it thus. For Bonur Golz is the boss of the "ray bunch" who wring the last drop of tribute from all the life of the ancient city, from all the area supplied by the "Stem," an area as big as several states on the surface, though sparsely populated by our standards.

Bonur's stronghold is a tremendous series of borings that surround the master highway of the Eastern caverns. This highway is called the "Stem" because it is one of the very few highways that connect with entrances to the uperworld. The underworld is so vast that little of it contains life, and not much has even been fully explored. However nigh half of the scattered communities for hundreds of miles around Ontal depend in a large part on the trucks that roll down the "Stem" from the great warehouses of surface New York.

That these trucks are unknown to New Yorkers is not surprising, for they do not go out on the surface often, and

when they do they are no different in appearance than other trucks. For though some of the ancient cave conveyances called rollats are used by such as Max, modern trucks from U. S. factories are chiefly used. A certain amount of the produce that enters New York finds its way down the "Stem," and who is to say where everything that enters New York may go? Bonur Golz and his gang hold the strings that control this flow of vitally necessary food-stuffs and commodities.

There are other entrances to the vast underworld than this same "Stem," but they are far away, and open upon primitive communities of no resources, unable to supply the needs of the underworld except in slight part. If they were important, Bonur's fighters would soon obliterate the life with the great dis-rays that are their weapons, and blow up the entrances so that no food came into the eastern underworld that did not pay his tax.

"RED" Nake is the top man of Bonur's bunch. He has held on to a slippery job for ten years. Nake is a sharp man. A strong slim body, on two long, thin legs; a sharp-nosed face always rusted with the stubble of his red beard; a too-wide mouth set with great, yellow dog teeth; and an evil laugh that sounds much too often, too high-pitched to be pleasant, ever.

Just now Nake is preparing a trap for the unwary rich returning to Ontal from the far southern pleasure spot called by words that carry the ancient name-sounds Sable Base, though what "sable base" may have meant phonetically in the old language no one knows today.

Sable Base was an ancient pleasure spot for the race who had built these vast city caverns over all earth's under-rock—and then left earth and most of



their work behind. Today the ancient, intricate playthings of the God-race still are used by the modern cavern dwellers—for the same purposes for which they were designed. Imagine a Coney-island built by superminds of a technical advancement a million years beyond our own—and with the wealth of a vast society to lavish on the building. It had been a great nursery for children mayhap—one cannot imagine serious-minded people playing their lives away in such a place. But when one has seen and experienced the thrills of Sable Base one *can* imagine it . . .

Intricate mirror mazes interspersed with super-stim impulses that lead on and on into the heart of the maze and in the heart of the maze one finds an opening into a great pool for swimming. An artificial Eden where the water itself is charged with synthetic pleasure nerve impulses—and the persons wandering through the maze take to the water and feel nigh to dying of the intense pleasure it gives them.

Great whirling rollat cars with synchronized dream projection for those seated to travel through infinitudes of wonder-lands without ever leaving their circle of travel in reality—and everything that any super-mind could wish for happens to those who ride the chariots—as actually as though it were not a dream!

Such devices and pleasure palaces were innumerable and Sable Base was a pleasure spot where all the rich of the whole Masked World went when they could afford the time; and that was often, for did not the slaves keep them well supplied with leisure time. They had their customary periods for visiting Sable Base, and now a great multitude of these pleasure seekers were winding back over the ancient tube roads toward the vast city of Ontal, which was only populated under part of our New York.

**R**ED NAKE had planned his trap well, for many of these returning people had things of value which his boss, Bonur Golz, coveted.

Female slaves of beauty and price, antique super-stim mech of the superior kind that only those families had acquired who had the knowledge to seek them for generations in the endless corridors of the world that lies in the darkness of the depths. Jewels that could be sold to the surface merchants—and the greater jewels that only the buyers who come infrequently from far space beyond the sun's reach could afford to buy. Stores of gold, stocks in surface corporations—many things they had that Bonur could take to make himself even more powerful than he was.

So, some twenty miles south of where the old highway debouched into the great bowl of rock that was Ontal proper—the heart of the ancient vastness that had been the God-city called Bakt—Nike set his trap, a double-circle of penetray weapons about the road that is called Ontal-way.

The use of these ancient weapons is an intricate art for they have such range, such maneuverability, and form such intricate interlocking patterns of vast range and power. Such instant obedience to even the weak hands of modern man they have that a man like Nike must make many provisions to assure his own safety from those who might wish to kill him from among his forces. He does this by facing them all in the same general direction in a great arc and welding the swinging snouts' range of movement to a small segment of a circle. Himself gets behind this sickle of weapons, an arc of vast ray power-of-fire some thirty to sixty miles in range—with his own longer range piece of the most powerful master-weapon he has been able to acquire. Behind him is always three or four of his



most trusted knaves, and neither can they swing their weapons upon his back—for that is provided for also. Thus surrounded on all sides by the great old ray which is as yet an undefeated weapon on earth—used for unknown centuries in such struggles—and himself at the lever of a weapon of vaster power than any other he has ever heard of in all the vast unexplored underworld from all the wandering, snooping nomads (or from any of the techs that search always for the treasure that is the priceless better sorts of antique mechanisms) Nake can feel quite safe. For no ray can approach him from any direction without first passing progressively more and powerful sets of ray beams of both offensive and defensive nature.<sup>1</sup>

At last Nake considers that all is ready, and they wait for a good bunch to collect under their ray beams before exposing their presence. One by one the rollats and incongruously different modern trucks and trailers and limousines from the surface trade collect before him, while the occupants are entertained with all manner of outrageous lies as to the reason for the delay.

Nake opened his wide gash of a mouth to say: "A goodly haul we'll

<sup>1</sup> There are many types of beams—"shorter" types for defense that "short" the offensive rays—and destructive rays of the "dis" type of many kinds.

This sort of trap is called a "cruel" in the underworld and it is truly a "cruel" sight to see the unsuspecting underworld people herded together under the ray beams and slaughtered wholesale. It is accompanied by a kind of thought-tamper as peculiar to it as baseball "talk" is to a baseball game. The victims are told strings of lies—"they are safe and among friends"; "just wait and all will be well"; or they are "about to be killed" because of some preposterous charge of obscene nature which is outlined mentally to their fear-struck minds—etc. etc.—all very entertaining to the cruel marauders who practice the "cruel", and vastly tormenting to the victims who know they are doomed to torture and slavery at the very least.

make from this batch of overstuffed ninnys, eh?"

"Aye, Nake, and why should they feel so safe? Why should they think their goods and slaves and wealth should *not* be stolen? An' they were not fools they would not be here so woefully underarmed. There is no place for fools on this wild earth."

### CHAPTER III

Bonur Golz, Fat Ruler

**B**ONUR GOLZ is very big—very fat. and strong—with a great red face and a black stubble always bristling slovenly round his sagging jewels. His lips are big and loose and very scarlet. His eyes are nearly hidden in the fat of his face. His clothes would seem curious to you who have not visited Ontal under New York. They are not modern clothes. They are often the clothes our ancestors wore in medieval times when they knew less than we think we know, and much more than we really do know about the ways called witchcraft. Bonur sometimes wore the clothes of the surface peoples, but he preferred the loose and antique-styled eastern robes fastened about the waist with a soft girdle—in which he could thrust a number of the potent but too-large antique hand weapons, just in case.

Bonur is big and fat and strong, and tonight he sits as usual dwarfed by the immensity of the ancient Titan's throne he has used as his own since he took over the Palace of the Stem.

Once that throne was the seat of a Titan of the God race that built the underworld. The vast entity who built that throne for his seat had imbued it with his own mighty dignity so that something of that God-like quality hangs still about the carved stone and

gilds the ugly body of Bonur with a grotesque gravity, an incongruous aura of omnipotence.

The great embroidered flowers on his silken robe glow lewdly in the soft light of the mighty cavern where the throne is the central note in a terrible symphony of vanished majesty and might carved from the ageless stone walls with their caryatids shaped like the forgotten giants of a more fortunate, vaster human race. This symphony of terrific, enigmatic and wholly alien beauty led in all its lines to the throne and thus to the emphasizing of the ugly sensuousity of Bonur's ugly body, its grossness wrapped in the glowing, florid silk so that he was the horribly ugly central motif of the whole tremendous scene. His hairy legs stick bare and lewd from under his robe, his eyes behind the rolls of piggish fat glitter as he watches the great valves, oversize entrances, built for a mightier and nobler race than the rats that now sheltered there, for those for whom he waits.

Bonur is waiting for Nake and his men to report on the results of the job he had given them. It was not a nice job, but the men he had chosen were used to that. A series of muffled sounds filtered through the air of the caves from some place not far off.

Bonur grinned, baring his yellow teeth, as he counted the sounds. The same number of great old cargo rollats he had sent out had returned. That meant a great deal to Bonur.

**I**NTO the vast, curiously decorated chamber that was as alien to the mind of modern man as was such as Bonur revolting—into this titanic setting for the evil grossness that was Bonur's self—strode three clanking figures. They were clad in the bad-fitting, cut-down suits of ray-proof armor of the ancients. Off from their necks they

lifted the too-big helmets, made of forgotten metal. The motion bared their faces.

Three dark, long-nosed visages, almost alike, so that at first glance the men might be mistaken for Red Nake's brothers. They were not brothers; they were of a race called sometimes, in olden times, "trolls" by the Europeans, though they were never confined to Europe even in medieval and ancient times. That old race of warlocks and underworld mysteries has much the same individual appearance to one strange to them—just as all negroes look alike to people not used to the race. In this case one could also say, just as all weasels look alike. Not that all trolls are weasels by nature—but that the nature of that blood-sucking cunning animal stared out of these similar, troll faces. The largest of the three men was Red Nake.

Within their little, close-set eyes over the long sharp-ridged noses gleamed no courage and no humanity. Gleamed instead a red glitter of madness—that peculiar madness inherited of some families of the underworld. But in the underworld it is not recognized as madness. Neither did the ancient Norse recognize the "baresarks" as mad, but only as men apt to be seized upon provocation with the lust for bloodshed.

There were three great two-foot-high steps leading up to that seat of forgotten majesty, and also a long ramp for those not equipped with the long legs of the antique men. Upon one of these steps the taller of the three dropped to a seat. He mopped his brow with a red cloth taken from the breast of his armor, for the warm, breezeless air of the caverns is not compatible with the wearing of much covering. The other two continued to divest themselves of the remainder of their armor. Looking up into the red, black-stubbed face of his



boss, the seated man waited for the questions he knew were coming. Bonur looked down at him, waiting, too—but also waiting for a signal within his mind from his concealed guard ray-mech and men that the man's words would be checked by the telaug for truth as he spoke. Then Bonur leaned forward saying—

"Well, speak it out. You know what I have waited for a full week—this message you bear me!

**RED NAKE** grinned triumphantly, pleased to have kept his master in suspense, and pleased to have a message that was safe to disclose to him. Nake used the antique salutation as is the custom still in the caverns, for Nake believed in formality to those able to harm him.

"My Lord Bonur, the enemy who might have yet unseated us—I mean unseated *you*—is no more a power. His caravan rolled neatly into our circle of war-ray. His ray-finders located not one of our hidden armored rollats before all his gun-pointers died. From the battle I bring you two hundred and fifty captives. One hundred and thirty of these are the women of the House of Pyotyr Flores."

Bonur's eyes appeared from the fat flesh of his red face, glowing and round with the gratifying fulfillment of his plans. He rubbed his heavy ringed hands, covered with bristling black hairs, together.

"Those same women brought about Flore's downfall, my Nake. They would insist on their annual trip to Sable Base. And the weakling would yield to their soft entreaties. Those ancient play-mech of Sable Base, what a friend to me they have been. The women got Flores out of his impregnable home, and onto south Ontal way, where I could lay a neat trap for his return.

Full nine years I have built my gins to get that thorn out of my side. Now, he is dead!"

"Not dead, Master. I winged him carefully—myself—in each shoulder. He sits outside at this moment, groaning and waiting your pleasure to groan more loudly."

"Ah Nake—that will be a pleasure. A pleasure long awaited!"

Bonur heaved his bulk onto his feet with surprising quickness, descended the three tall ancient steps. He clapped Red Nake on the shoulder, grinning evilly.

"Well done, Nake. For this pleasure you shall be rewarded by the pick of the women you have captured for your own. Now, get Flores in here, like a good fellow—bring him before my eyes!"

Bonur rubbed his hands avidly, continually. The black hairs on the backs of his hands bristled with the same evil anticipation that wreathed his face in gloating smiles. The lurid flowers on the silk of his robe moved in great fluttering movements as he moved—red and green petals rustling softly over the purple field of the silk. He leaned forward, watching the great door through which his enemy would be brought at last to grovel at his feet.

**THE** double valves of the far door opened again, and through it came Nake, pushing a tall slim figure that staggered and stopped, staggered forward and stopped, to be pushed again. His face was streaked with the tears of desperation and rage, his arms hung useless at his sides, swinging slightly and painfully. Two round burns at each shoulder showed through the charred cloth where the dis-ray had rendered him harmless by burning out his muscles and nerves in his shoulder sockets. He was clothed in a black,

tight suit of the old ray-defensive metal weave—a stuff impervious to all but the strongest of ray beams. At neck and at wrists the inner stuff of his shirt, a white-gleaming fabric, overlaid with a pattern of red that showed now mingled oddly with his blood stains, thrust out in dainty ruffs that were now torn. His shoes were the long upturned points patterned after the medieval styles still affected by some cave peoples.

Flores was a slim, strong man at bay. He stood facing Bonur, his thin, sharp face working in anger that he could strike no blow at the blasphemy he evidently considered the life in the bloated, heavy body of his captor. They stood looking at each other for the space of six breaths, then Flores gritted out—

“Now you have me, you spawn of Hell. Get it over with; there is no room for both of us to live in the same world. Kill me and have done!”

Bonur strode toward the man, stood gloating into his weary, inflamed eyes for a moment, then spat squarely into his face.

“You snivelling scarecrow, already you cry for death. Don’t expect death so easily, my fine feathered fool. I have waited too long, for the sport to end before it is well started.”

Pyotyr Flores took the insult, the red mounted in a rush of blood to his face, then receded as he struggled to control himself. Quieter, he said:

“Bonur, this struggle and piracy among us weakens us all till the first intruder in our holdings will whip us—and you among them. Our people will die under the rays of some mad bunch from the far east or the south—while we roast over their fires. Must we fight thus? Why can’t we be at peace and grow strong, as we were when all the ray of the world feared our anger—and no cavern of earth was looted by the wanderers of space. At Sable Base I

had much contact with the powerful from many parts of the underworld. They wax mightily insolent to us who once ruled all the western ways from Ontal to Sable Base to Antheria. Our piracy among ourselves in the past ten years will in time cause not only our own fall, but the death of all our peoples. And the ways of the fiercest barbarians of the lost caverns will be the ways of these Eastern caverns, too.”

“FLORES, I have heard such bleating before. It is ever the cry of the rebel when brought to bay—let us unite against our mutual enemies. I have no worse enemies on earth than you and yours.”

“It is you who have made it so, my ‘Lord’ Bonur of the Stem. But, ten years ago no black ray from Africa would have cursed me to my face, would have spat upon my shadow—yet that thing I saw and heard and was forced to swallow at Sable Base. And if you went there, worse would happen to you; for you are vastly more hated than ever I have been by the barbarians of the uncivilized caverns. And what would you do about an insult from one of their chieftans with your few hundred cultists—or even if you had time to call together all the mad ones whom you have cultivated—instead of the thousands of swift, sane ray-heads that once answered the banner of the Lord of the Stem-way? Think, Bonur! Me you may kill, but for the sake of men of Ontal and her subject cities, I ask you—think and change your ways. The land is dying under your stewardship. The people of Ontal itself are starving. They cannot earn the prices that are put upon foods. That is because of your taxes which wring blood from every bit of the necessities of life that passes the Stem toll-posts. Sooner or later they must kill you or die.”



"If they cannot pay their debts—there is always the slave block to welcome them. Then they may eat."

"To make the whole peoples of Ontal and the other cities served by the Stem slaves—is that your purpose Bonur, a free man makes a more loyal ray than a slave!"

"Flores, I have more gold than any ruler of the Stem ever had before me. Argue against that!"

"I can! Bonur Golz, I can! There are greater values than gold; there is the spirit of your followers. Yours are hungry for the same gold you hoard. Mine were not so. Yours would every man of them kill you gladly for one small part of that gold, and sometime will! Mine would not so by me. A loyal man at your back cannot be bought with gold. But he can be bought with fair treatment. Can you know that, or are you wholly blind?"

"Words will not save you, Pyotyr Flores. Your death I will have. These soft words will not turn away my ten-year-old wrath against you." Bonur twisted his mouth into a savage grin, trying to hold his anger hot against the wise words of this hated man, and failing.

"My Lord Bonur, it is not for myself I try to turn your anger into careful thought. It is for my daughter's sweet sake. Will you give her a car—let her go? She has harmed you in no way. Can you find the mercy in you to do me that one favor?"

Bonur laughed, a hideous laugh that showed in him little of human spirit. A blind lust seemed the soul of him in that laugh, the laugh of a sadist—the laugh of a man who was not truly sane.

"Your daughter, free? Man, you are mad. I shall give her to my things, whom I keep on a leash to set against those whom I hate most. You may watch what they do to her over the

penetrat. You should enjoy their entertainment!"

FLORES had all the time been edging closer to the burly belly of the ruler. At these words he bent and swiftly butted the man with all his strength under the chin. Bonur staggered back and sat down hard on the first great step of the giant's throne, half unconscious from the blow.

Flores struggled forward awkwardly to kick him, his only weapons his feet, but Nake the Red caught him around the neck with the crook of his elbow and threw him to the floor. Nake struck him several times over the head with his pistol butt and Flores lapsed into stillness, blood from his head staining the polished rock of the floor. Then Nake joined the other two solicitously helping the ruler to his feet.

Bonur shook his head to clear it, then stepped to Flores unconscious body and kicked him hard in the side. The man did not make a sound and Bonur kicked him in the face twice, listening for the sound of bones cracking. Flores' eye, a bloody grape—rolled free. Still he lay unconscious, and Bonur motioned with his hand for the men to take him out.

As they left the ruler mounted the too-high steps laboriously and again sat down on the throne that murder had got him ten years before. He panted, and his face was alternately red, then gray as his heart struggled with his fat to set him to rights again. Somehow the interview had not been the sport he had expected. Well, the fool would pay a thousand times and more for that blow before he died!

Now down onto the gloomy old stone of the throne where he sat came a ray from his watching slave girls, and their trembling voices sought to please him as they stilled the gross body under the flowered robes. Relaxing under the

pleasure of the ancient nerve rays, Bonur thought how they had failed to stop that butt as it was conceived in the mind of the captive Flores—and swore aloud, anger again reddening his face.

"Bring to me that watch-ray who failed to read the mind of the man before me—who failed to protect me as is her duty." Bonur's voice was a panting croak of anger.

THE soft weeping of the fearful girls answered him, for they knew how terrible he was when angered and presently through the doors came the nearly unclad form of his favorite. She was a girl named Sarah Beale. She had been brought to the Stem-palace from the surface as a child, sent down because she had wandered into the warehouse where the trucks were being loaded with goods and supplies. She had been raised under the hands of Bonur's women, and been trained in all the intricate debauchery of strange vices of the ancient pleasure rays since her childhood. Bonur had always had a soft spot in his heart for her. But anger obscured all this in his mind as he looked down upon her. She stood before him weeping, her hair a soft silken aureole of beauty. Her hands clasped fearfully and shyly before her—she stood, not looking up at his face which was an evil mask of hideous anger in the half light of the huge place.

"If you have anything to say, say it! If you do not think enough of me to save me a blow like that, how do I know you would not do a worse thing, and let a fatal ray beam through upon me some day when we are attacked?"

"Oh, my Lord Bonur, I did not think he could strike you without arms, and I was laughing at some joke the girls were making. It just happened that no one was watching the throne room but myself—all the other rays were watching

the far ways for any pursuit or attack that Nake's raid might have occasioned. There are too few of us watchers for all the many ways, the Stem palace needs much more of ray hands than it has, Bonur. Most are far off in their guard duty the last ten days."

"You have deserved death from me, Sarah. But I have a weakness for you, knowing you since you were little. It is your first slip, let it be your last. Bring me the whip!"

The girl went slowly to the place behind the great seat where hung a heavy braided whip of leather, plaited with little bits of metal cunningly set in the thongs. Bending prettily and handing it to him, she bared her back and stood waiting. Bonur rose and brought the whip down twice across her soft young skin, and then looked at the great bloody wheals it had raised quickly upon her back. She had not uttered a cry but stood waiting for the prolonged beating she expected. But Bonur was not the fool some thought him, not always. This girl was an influence among the women of his household, and he did not want them hating him entirely. He cast the whip at her feet and turned away.

"See that a better watch is set here—after on the throne itself, and double the ray-watch everywhere. Yourself attend to this, or I will know of it and my anger will not be so easily sated. Then tell me who are the people you choose, I may not like them well. See that you do this rightly, my little mouse. Your position in my house is none too certain now."

"Yes, oh lord of my heart." An enigmatic smile on her sweet young face, Sarah bent and picked up the whip. Hanging it in its place, she left. But if Bonur could have seen into her mind then he would have completed the beating till death had claimed her. For



Sarah had long hidden her hatred of this thing that was her lord and master.

**D**OWN in the hidden chambers where only the Satanist's cult and members of Bonur's personal staff were ever admitted—the great truck-loads of captives unloaded. Into their cells they were herded, hardly counted. There were but a few dozen armed men about the place, for Bonur did not spend money unnecessarily—and one must pay men who bear arms—slaves are not trusted with weapons. Unfed, they waited out the sleep period, and in the morning came the count and the sentencing. Those who had still some possessions which they could reveal to Bonur would live till they were found. The older men whose possessions were entirely in his hands would die. The younger would be sold as slaves in some far city, where they could not find friends to free them against Bonur. The women had a higher price as slaves, when they were young as these were. The older women died, too.

And after a long, long time, death came to Pyotyr Flores in those chambers. How it came I will not tell you, but it was time.

Men of the surface think the death camps and slave labor of the world have been wiped out with the fall of the Nazis. But that is not true! They have their smaller counterparts in the vast underworld, and they are far older. The centuries have changed the life of the caverns but little, and that not for the better.

#### CHAPTER IV

Bill and Nita Flores

**A** FEW miles from the palace of the Stem, in a very lovely chamber of cavern rock, decorated with great sinu-

ous odaliskues of the elder races' work, with weird sea plants and other beauties carved in the stone—a girl wife spoke to her husband.

"If the mask that hides our life from the surface were lifted, I am sure our life would be changed. The new influence would sweep away these time-forged cobwebs that bind us so smotheringly—"

Bill Flores' frown was a reflection of the frown that sat on young Nita's white forehead, for it was the frown of people who have looked on Death and managed to elude him so long that very weariness has made him no enemy. It is the frown that honorable men wear when they are under the degrading rule of a despot. Too, they were worried about the non-return of their rich relative and powerful protector, Pyotyr Flores.

"Bonur, the fat tightwad, is too cheap to send out the rays to sweep the cavern ways of bats. The far ways are nearly impassable with bat droppings. The bats themselves are becoming a threat to driving. We are hungry, nothing is done for the people of the city, everything against us. Yet still I think the mask is better on than off, for to remove the ancient mask that hides our life from surface men would result in similar slavery and degradation for all of them."

"But, Bill, when some mad little nomad ray decides it is time to start his epidemic of simulated rheumatic fever—or influenza or whatever—and sets out with his collection of antique junk to simulate all the sensations and ill results of disease—the surface men would know and find some way in time of defending themselves from such silly and devouring persecution. They might even find a way of helping us—there are so many good minds among such a great number of educated people."

"They have nothing with which to fight the antique ray weapons." Bill's frown was ingrained in his forehead as were the problems that caused the frown ingrained in his brain. It had been so in a long line of ancestors who had faced the same problems and failed to find the answer. "Our only hope is a helping visitor from space. Some neighbor world where they have used the ancient secrets openly and developed the use of them benevolently."

"Bill, it is like hoping for God. Men have always hoped for such help, but they do not get it. No one from a planet of sane ray-life will land on this madman's nightmare of a world. And if they did, some ray would see them and find a way of wrecking their ship ere it touched earth."

"Yes, if one landed in New York harbor—and Bonur saw it—he would fire upon it before it had established contact with the surface people to give them weapons that would discover us to them—and give them a chance of defending themselves against us."

"Bill, we have talked of these things so long our very lips know the words, and no thing have we ever found new about them all. It is the same old problem of power in evil hands—power so great that no good men can overcome and obliterate it. We still have the evil degenerates who make our lives miserable with their devilish ways, and they still have the terrific power that even we with all our knowledge of the ancient mech cannot overcome—and there just isn't any answer."

"Well, drop the worry, we are always at it is true."

"I will dance for you, Bill—or with you. For a moment we will forget our misery; even forget we are hungry."

**N**ITA lifted her too-thin, but still beautiful and lithe form from the

couch by the telemach screen, and touching a button on an ancient "Lusco" music-mech nearby, poised for a moment while the ancient magic of the God-thought-music thrilled its infinitely varied tones through the rock chamber. Then, picking up the motif of the music with her body's slowly increasing undulations, she swept into a series of dizzying movements that brought the man to his feet in admiration. Then she glided into his arms and the two danced lovingly, gravely, together for a time. Then they flung themselves down upon the couch again, breathless, but not laughing. The man looked at his watch.

"We used to dance for hours, Nita. Now ten minutes tires us. We must get more food, some way. If only Pyotyr would return—if only I could figure where to turn for a hand. We must find a way to live. There is nothing to wait here for, nothing to do! The city itself is starving; food just cannot be got!"

Nita looked at him sidewise, sorrowfully. He read her look.

"No, you beautiful child—you young witch. Not that. I guess we would both rather die."

"But I won't have to do that, I can dance at the 100 Club. The manager knows me; will hire me. And even if the pay will no longer buy food the prices things have become, I can cadge some from the kitchen men for you—and I can get my meals there, and maybe bring some home."

"It would be the first step, Nita. Sooner or later one of them would see you. They would take a fancy to you, and how could I oppose *them*? It would be the last I would see of you. Better to stay out of sight till Bonur's works have gone the way of all evil things."

"I guess it is better to starve quietly to death, at that." Her smile was tired,



but a lovely thing on her too-white face. The red lips drooped like weary flowers over his.

"I think if the surface people knew the Hell we are in, somehow they would find a way to help us."

"Nita, they could not help us. Many of them hate us. They blame us for the mockery, for the vile work of the nomads, and for the proud spite of the evil ones. We would be forced to fight them for our life if they did find a way to struggle against us. Those who do not know us would hate us if they knew the truth of our ancient secret way of hiding the whole wonder of the cavern world from them."

"If the 'Helpers' had a rock borer, they would locate a thin place and bore out to bring in food—without Bonur's tax that starves us all. Can't one be located in the abandoned borings of the old ones?"

"Nita, we have one in readiness, but it is not the time to use it. Even if we were successful, the stool-pigeons that wait a chance to get Bonur's stingy favor would squeal on us even as we sold them untaxed food. Even empty bellies will not put spine in some of those worms."

"I know, we have an overabundance of such fools. The whole race of the underworld has lived under such oppression so many centuries, been enslaved and degraded so long they are weak in just those things that would make us free. And the Bosses of the Entrys—and Bonur of our Stem-way—go on choking us to death with taxes."

"The Masked World is a dying world, lately, right enough. But Ontal has declined before in the past and come back again—only after the worst of the Stem gang had died by some brave hand."

**B**ILL bent and absently picked up two magazines, gaudy things with

lurid covers. *Exciting* and *Seven-Swank*. He mused aloud. "The taste our panderers show is disgusting, isn't it? Nothing to brag about there, Nita."

"They are horrible. Much of the material is a deliberate, hardly hidden mockery of all of us who are out of power, out of favor with the inner gang. A mockery of all the underdogs. The pictures are scenes of torture and death of sometimes well known figures of our life—thinly disguised—to appear like posed scenes. But in reality everyone knows it is the evil rule bragging of its power by showing its secret torture chambers off to us. It is supposed to strike fear into us to keep us from thinking of resisting the death that eats at us all."

"They are horrible, right. They seem to be published for sadists and mindless fools. Look at this scene in *Exciting*; those girls tortured with hot chains. I have seen such things and I swear these are genuine scenes of actual torture."

Nita pointed to a girl in the picture. "See, her back bleeds from a dozen wounds that are incompletely re-touched. Those long scars show on her back from previous beatings. Now she is plainly dying of the hot chains. There is no end to our degradation. We are supposed to buy and enjoy these scenes of our bravest and best being tortured to death."

"It was a sad day for Ontal when Bonur seized the palace of the Stem, and set his taxes on our only food source."

"I think his real idea is to reduce us all to slaves. When the people get hungry enough, they will seek the auction block, to get the food for themselves and the money for their people to buy food. When the strength of the city and of the neighboring cities that feed from the Stem-way is gone, Bonur need have fear of no one."

"The *Seven-Swank* magazine has an article saying—'The Control Arsenals, built so long ago by the mighty Elder race, will outlast the race. The power output is undiminished, time affects the machinery not at all and much of the machinery is in complete repair.'" Nita sighed.

"In other words there is no hope for the people. I think the article is a lot of lies. While the ancient power-mech does not deteriorate visibly, a strange force comes from the old machines the more they are used. Something is changed in them by use and time. The older they are in use, the less do the machine tenders and mechanics like to approach them. There are emanations from the most-used old power-mech that cause serious burns to anyone near them too long, and the power—the electric from them—once beneficial and good when used in the ben-ray mech, now causes the same ben-ray mech to give off only detrimental rays. The article is an attempt to cover the spread of such information; to make themselves feel safe. There is plenty of anger ready and waiting to blast at them the first opportunity—and the power arsenals are becoming a weakness instead of a strength."

"But what sort of opportunity does that give us? No underdogs ever yet overcame the powerhouses or the central control arsenals before."

"I have often thought that a poisoner's club might give us the answer. I can't figure how to work the poisoning with the constant watch by the rodite over the telaug beams. Can you, Nita, figure how it might be done?"

"Only if the rodite were in on the plot. I fear even to think of the idea when I know they may be watching and reading my thought."

"Old Benz is one of the rodite clique, and an old one among them. He might

be able to swing it for us. He must know what cruel idiots this bunch around Bonur are—what they do to us."

"Bill, no! If you talk to him, sound him out very carefully; he might have to turn on you if he thought you had talked the idea over with others—were foolishly careless. He might be in the confidence of Bonur, anything might happen. If only Uncle Pyotyr would return . . ."

"We've got to do something, Nita. I will try to bum some money off of Benz, and if it looks favorable, I will discuss the poison idea as someone else's idea I had heard. Then if he is favorable I will suggest our working it out. He may be able to get me some food at the very least."

ABOVE the despairing lovers roared the traffic of New York, but unheard by them through the miles of rock. For they were citizens of the Masked World, and New York does not form a part of that world—except as a port of entry for the favored few. The lower classes—whom Nita had recently joined because of the inadequacy of their income due to the taxes—never go in or out of the "Stem" of their world.

Bill got up and went out, after kissing Nita a fond goodbye. He did not need a hat, or a coat, for the temperature of the caverns never varies from a warm dry heat that its people are habituated to.

As Bill passed one of the great windows set in the houses of the "Elder" world, he heard a conversation—for the windows of the cavern world have no need of glass, are chiefly placed for ventilation—revealing to him the hopeless condition of law in the formerly endurable city.

"Do you know what you have signed? I will tell you, you fool. You have signed a power of attorney which gives



me full control of your money, your houses, all your possessions. You see, I do not have to marry you to get what I want from you! We of the Wast's get what we want without debasing ourselves."

Bill looked into the luxurious lounge of the great home. On a divan sprawled a slightly gowned, tigerish young beauty whose well-fed form told Bill she was one of those close to Bonur. She was laughing sneeringly at a slender young man before her, who stood with a pen in his hand staring down at a document he had just signed. Bill knew what had made him sign it, for in the rear of the room another woman was holding a ray-beam upon the helpless man while she waited. It was a synthetic "will" ray of a pleasant nature that Bill could feel even outside. Bill knew the man had been controlled by the ray from the ancient ro-mech, had had no choice but to do what the operator willed him to do with the mechanism's strong beam. Bill hurried on, fearing to be seen listening, but could not help hearing the rest of the words . . .

"You she-devil!"

The woman's nasty, triumphant laughter answered.

"You will tell no one and do nothing about this for you are going into our special little room where we keep fellows like you on ice till we need them for some rigmarole or other that our laws require. Then you will appear, under control, and the formality will be observed. When we are through with you—you know how you will die."

Bill knew how the man would die, too. He knew the habits of the sadists. Sadism was very fashionable; for the ruling clique being so inclined, everyone who toadied and expected to get along with the gang in the palace of the Stem affected cruelty as a character, to be in line with the ruler. The poor slaves and

other victims suffered daily under the whip, and regularly many helpless men and women died in various strange and intricate ways—ways which the slaves spent much time in devising and executing in order to escape a similar fate themselves. And everyone who was "in" watched such parties of blood and death and feigned to enjoy it all very much, because not to do so would be to be marked by the spys as a potential enemy of the great Bonur and his cronies.

FURTHER down the way—called the "Street of the Sleepers," after the great statues with closed eyes which lined the way—Bill passed a young girl in a doorway, weeping and wiping something from her shapely bare legs—wiping something that on closer approach proved to be splattered blood.

"What happened, did you hurt yourself?" asked Bill. The girl glanced up at him and sobbed out—"Oh, my mistress whipped me! I can't stand it, I can't! And every week it's the same, for their fun . . ."

Bill had seen such parties among the sadists himself and knew what she meant. So he finished her speech for her—"And if you run away—you would be caught, and then you would be killed! I know, Ontal is in the worst shape I have ever seen it—or heard of."

As Bill went on his way helplessly, he knew that sooner or later the young slave-girl's white body would grace the entertainment with its dying torments.

Ever about Bill as he passed the poorer quarters people begged of him for a coin to buy a bit of food. Bill pitied them and showed them his empty hands and went on.

And Bill went into the offices of the "rodite" who are the police of Ontal—for rodite is the ancient's word for police, and he passed in his card with a

note asking to be brought before the chief of this section, Rudy Benz. Benz was old in the service and possessed of some influence which he might turn to account.

Inside, Rudolph Benz, the old Rodite chief noted the young man's approach sadly. He knew the young fellow was on the proscribed list since his uncle, Pyotyr Flores, had been taken by Bonur Golz' henchmen. He would have to arrest him! And few survived the prisons for long nowadays; there was little food for even a free man in the city. Especially would one of Flores' line be sure to die, for Bonur hated the family as well as wanted no heirs about to dispute his confiscation of the wealth.

Rudolph Benz smiled sadly down on William Flores from his high desk. They were old acquaintances, but Benz ignored this as well as the card bearing his name which Bill had sent in.

"You are James Bean, are you not? What brings you here?"

Bill, slow on the uptake, as well as being hampered mentally by a vengeful watch-ray interfering with his thought, did not understand Benz' subterfuge or the reason for it. Why should Benz affect not to recognize him—to mistake him for someone else?

"Chief, you know me as well as you know your own son. I am William Flores, of this city." Bill's words came as a surprise to himself, and he realized that the watch ray had made him speak by control in order to get him into some trouble which Old Benz was trying to keep him from.

An obsequious clerk, lifting his head from his scribbling, saw and sensed what was going on. He got up and hustled over to Benz, his beady eyes and unhealthy face alight with the opportunity to check the old man in an error. His short, loudly whispered "All Flores' men are ordered held by Lord

Bonur," Bill could not hear fully but saw by Benz' face that it meant some disaster to him.

Benz realized it was no use trying to shield Bill Flores, for his clerk would squeal on him. So he said sorrowfully, "William Flores, it is my solemn duty to arrest you in the name of the law. Your uncle, Pyotyr Flores, has been adjudged guilty of treason, and all his friends and relatives and persons otherwise associated with him are suspects—to be held for examination. Officers, do your duty!"

Bill turned, desperately seeking with his eyes for a non-existent way of avoiding the trap he had so trustingly walked into. Even as he turned, two burly coppers in the gray tunics of Bonur's police seized his arms. Bill struggled wildly, crying out to Benz.

"My God, Benz, if I knew anything about it, would I have walked in here with my eyes open? I wanted to see you on a personal matter, as well as to ask you if you had heard any news of my uncle, who has been in Sable Base for two months. This is all a fearful mistake."

The clerk, a thin lipped smile of satisfaction at having the whip-hand over Benz for a moment, spoke loudly.

"The examination will bring out his innocence or guilt. He is under suspicion, and we must above all obey orders."

Old Benz said nothing, only smiling sadly at Bill, resolving in his mind to "get something" on that double-damned clerk if it was the last thing he ever did. For everyone in the room knew that few men survived a police "examination" when they were heirs to a fortune, as Bill was since Flores was under sentence of death. Bonur would see to that, for even in the little-regarded law books, the state took over all such moneys that had no claimants.

## CHAPTER V

## To Find a Poison

"**MURDER** doesn't matter, down here!"

The speaker was a long-nosed man of a wizened, wise face and peculiar, gnarled and gnomish appearance. His blood was different from others in the city, being from the Picts of the Northlands of England, while mostly the other ray people of Ontal were from southern and western Europe, of nearly the same build and appearance as modern Americans, though the ages of their ancestors life in the caverns gave them a lighter, less-muscled build, lighter bones, and the extremely white skin of all the cavern people. There were other differences from surface man—larger eyes, and in this man a bigger, almost grotesque mouth; and a quicker, more alert look in the eyes. His name was Brack Longen, and he was bending over Nita. Her nearly dead young body had been found by him, fearfully emaciated, waiting silently for the return of her man, or for death.

"Get some milk, and warm it at the heat place . . ." Brack spoke sharply to his companion Tim Shanter. "We don't want our old friend Nita to die."

Tim hastened about his task, but found no milk in the place. He brought some water from the great flowing dragon mouth of the ancient fountain in the center of the room and warmed it for a moment over the electric heat rods of the heat-place, then put it to Nita's lips tenderly.

"Child, why didn't you call us? What do you think friends are for? We can get food where children like you and Bill fail. And what has become of Bill?"

Nita looked up at him mutely, then gathering her strength—

"Brack, I know he is dead—and I did not want to live without him. Why did you have to come? As soon as I heard Pyotyr Flores had been taken by Bonur, I knew what had become of Bill."

"Ah, nonsense, child. He is probably well and waiting at the prison pens for you—and sore as a boil you haven't been to search for him. Now get your backbone stiffened!"

**SOME** hours later, after Brack and Tim had gotten some liquid food into Nita, they carried her out to their waiting rollat and put her in the great seat in the back, a seat built to hold the giant bodies of the ancient race. There are modern trucks and cars from the surface in use but still the antique vehicles are used, for they are superior, faster, and more dependable. But they get rarer as times goes on.

Brack's voice was bitter. "Murder doesn't matter, nor any other rotten thing, since Bonur got hold of the Stem. Once we of the underworld had some defense against evil. But those days have gone. No way of getting food but to do Bonur's bidding, and so we starve and die—as Nita nearly has."

Tim looked at Brack's long-nosed, thin face. It was the face of a bitter, over-wise gnome, but the spirit that is MAN moved behind it.

"Brack, how can you conceal such thoughts from the rodite-ray? We will be seized, if you let yourself go so."

Brack looked at Tim wryly. "There is no way to keep from thinking, and so long as these evils go on, such as you and I must die trying to keep from being noticed as rebellious thinkers. We would leave Ontal for good, if we were wise. But you know why we stay. We know of no place that is better, for the mad rays devil all men in the unsettled places, and it is death to go out into that



uncharted, endless labyrinth."

"Brack, I went to the circus yesterday. Lura the dancer died. You remember her; the beauty of her was in every heart that ever saw her. The great ones commanded her, but by subtle means she kept her body's freedom so she could dance for all of us. They commanded her to their homes sometimes, but, strangely, after some months or weeks—those whom Lura had entertained unwilling, the most cruel of our powerful men, died of some strange sickness. A dozen of them she killed before they got their heads together and connected her with the deaths. Some subtle poison of old she slipped into their veins in their sleep . . . and went sweetly on her way. From that day they sickened slowly and died. At last the fire claimed her in the circus, but I swear the stim-rays followed her every pain and quenched it ere it hurt her. Such as her have always friends among the ray-peoples. Her death was not painful, she smiled upward as if in ecstasy as the flames consumed her, not a quiver or a scream from her did they

get to gloat over.\*

"And she relieved us of a dozen oppressors . . ."

Brack held up a hand.

"Tim Shanter, you have given me an idea! Say no more of this till we have reached our metal room." Brack's lips twisted over the rotted teeth—teeth that Brack knew were rotten because there was no food to keep teeth whole available to him. Brack was not pretty, but Brack was a man.

THE mysterious "Helpers" of the underworld are descendants of those families among them who have always, according to legend and tale, helped man by doing him favors that man has considered only a "God" could do. These "Helpers" are still a force in the underworld which guards always such men as Tim and Brack. These "Helpers" of the underworld guard me as I write. For the evil of the Masked World are of reputation and fact loath to be exposed to the eyes of those men whom they have injured so terribly and so continually since the earliest times.

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\* Under our feet the Masked World goes on it's evil consuming way. The future of all men is squandered there in endless orgies whose nature no surface man can comprehend—for words will not tell of the pleasures of stim-death, of the pleasures of sadism made infinitely more so by augmentation of all the body's and mind's impulses. And likewise for the torments of the victim—they are made infinitely more painful by augmentation of all the body's nerve messages.

That future that they squander is the minds of men able to understand the uncorroded machines that are their ancient power—able to understand the necessity for study of the ancient lore that abounds still in the endless labyrinths of the Masked World. For the area of Masked World is greater by far than the surface area of earth for the dense stone of the deep caverns keeps out even the slightest trace of dampness from miles of sea even overhead. And there are as many levels to the greatest old buildings of the ancients within the rock of the underworld as there are floors to a skyscraper—and more beside, for if there is one thing noticed down there it is that there is always more passages, more levels above and below, more

and more endlessly of the ancient city that covered the whole world deep under the surface.

Multiply the floor area of a skyscraper by the area of the United States, and you may get some idea of the immense and largely unexplored area of the Elder World.

It is a world that the rulers of the few existant entrys keep choked of all development because they fear all intelligent growth, for they are deficient. Those rays lying about unused everywhere about the endless corridors of dense, unyielding rock . . . any one of those ancient mechanisms would revolutionize all surface science; but the rulers of the Masked World are too devilishly mean to give the surface man even one tiny bit of that ancient science for study, one bit of that endlessly intricate mech for analysis.

That is fear of what we may do with it—and a thing as craven as that is not worthy of our fear. I say to you who fear these worm-like spirits who keep these things from us—those non-existent souls of the more evil of those below—fear them not, and bring about what we know must be brought about before man can advance into his future.—  
Author.

As Tim and Brack stepped from the old rollat at their destination—the helpers found their work necessary. A telesolidograph projection of sudden struggle sprang into existence about the two men. Tim and Brack, old hands at this ticklish game of evasion of the far eye of a nosy police ray, dropped to the pavement so that the images of the solidograph might take their places upon the far screens of the police rays' mech. And in that twinkling as they dropped, the clever hands of the helpers substituted projection for flesh where Tim and Brack had stood. It was a "fake" attack by the Helpers, Tim and Brack knew from past experience, planned to supplant a real attack by bonafide police under Bonur.

Brack and Tim crawled rapidly away from the scene, and allowed a half hour to elapse before they returned for the sleeping Nita. The sudden struggle about them of the solid-seeming projection of men and weapons they knew was a warning as well as a saving device. The rodite police of Bonur must know somewhat of their activities and have set a watch ray upon their home, and the Helpers must have lied to the "watchers" saying that they themselves planned to obliterate the two men. All this they knew instantly by deduction and by past experience with the methods of the Helpers. They had no great respect for Bonur's rodite, for the "Helpers" often foiled their distant watch ray with such image devices and many another trick that is better not set down here for still in use.

But the incident had the further value of telling them they were "looked for," "wanted" men—and they knew the scene had saved their lives by throwing the real pursuit off the trail. The corrupt, hereditarily lazy ray-watch would drop their watch after seeing them so providentially disposed of by parties

unknown or fictitious in some secret "Helpers" report. Nor if they turned up living later would much be said—for the ray watch were a lazy lot as were most of Bonur's parasitic bunch who tended to nothing so much as their own safety and comfort, and acted only on direct pressure from Bonur or his inner clique.<sup>3</sup>

WHAT the watch ray saw from the distance was a projection of a car roll up beside Tim and Brack's rollat, stop and fire on the two men. They saw the two men get out, fall to the pavement, saw the attackers also get out, approach the two bodies, kick them, pick them up and throw them in the car and drive off, leaving the corroded old rollat stand where it was. That none of this happened they did not know, for at a distance none could say whether a telesolidograph projection was real or unreal. They were fooled, and glad of it, for it saved them the job of going after the two themselves. Any exertion on their part was a thing to be put off as long as possible. In that they were not unlike surface police, though perhaps more so due to hereditary laziness.

Tim and Brack held their minds blank for the benefit of anyone watching now and trusted to the unknown friendly ray to keep the danger from them. Their steps hastened again to their parked rollat and their wheels sped now toward another destination more apt to prove safe than this. They were going to a friend, a very wise friend of theirs,

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the slothfulness of upperclass members of the underworld is proverbial (in certain groups and areas). They lie about all day long, slaves spoon the food into their mouths, remove their offal, wash them! Dreams from the dream-mech, stimulating pleasure rays from the stim-mech, are their life! It is their sloth that is responsible for the horrible conditions in some of the underworld's biggest peopled areas. They have the power to correct, will not do so—nor let others do so.—Author.

whose name was Ben Uniatty.

The ancients equipped certain rooms in the vast warrens with a metal lining impervious to detrimental rays (to serve the same purpose as our air raid shelters)—a dense stuff of awful weight—and to the unaided eye these rooms much resembled others lined with other kinds of metal. If one were wise to the ways of the ancients one soon knew which were "metal rooms" and which were not. Tim and Brack had long made use of one of these special rooms for their hangout, and its impervious secrecy had long protected them from all police ray charges of rebellious thoughts. Likewise had old Ben Uniatty built himself a great laboratory, little by little through the years, where no watch ray ever disturbed his thought. When they left these rooms they made up their mind as one makes up a bed; to the eye of the mind reading telaug rays they were people completely in love with their miserable condition and their worthless, cruel oppressive overlords. Once home again they could relax and curse them, or plot to their heart's content, which gave them much satisfaction, though little had come of it so far in truth.

Within the secret walls, they had stored many tools of their trade. Likewise in Ben Uniatty's huge burrow deep under Ontal they had made a practice of storing all the strange or broken mech they had been able to pick up through the years of their work around the great, half-empty city. For their trade was repair work on the ancient, intricate mech, and that trade is an hereditary one in the Masked World. They had also many weapons and similar forbidden things, which could be explained if they should have to as things given them for repair. But the necessity for such explanation was seldom required due to the aforesaid sloth of the watchers.

Their trade was one favored highly over all others, for the need for such work was very great, and they were in truth privileged characters of the city.

INSIDE the great, laboratory-like place, they saw no signs of old Ben Uniatty. But the place was big as an office building, with many rooms, and Ben might be at work anywhere about on some of his own mysterious experiments. Brack made Nita comfortable and turned to Tim.

"Tim Shanter, remember I said to you that you had given me an idea?"

"Aye, Brack, I remember well, I have been wondering what it was that caught your mind so?"

"Tim, the cooks—the under-cooks of Bonur's staff—are slaves of little mind. They are those 'cut' of brain in their childhood to make them as tractable to work without pay as possible. They cannot reason, cannot remember well, know little outside of their daily work. If we could give them some of Lura's fatal poison as a seasoning—something they would not know was poison—the watch-ray would never read the danger in their minds."

"Brack, many of our best protectors, even some of the unknown 'Helpers,' dine at the banquets of the evil ones we hate so. They would die too?"

"There are certain gatherings to which the good are neither admitted nor would they attend. It is those feasts where girls die under the super-stim for the entertainment, where those men like ourselves burn all night in the pain-fires to light their feast—those feasts where all the evil we know secretly exists is openly displayed. The flesh of a babe is the sacred wafer, and the whole evil throng worship the image of Satan—an image that comes to life and takes part in the orgies, so they say. Some of that human flesh they eat then could be the



bearer of the poison that would free us at one blow."

"You mean the Feast of the Sabbath, though there are other feasts of the Devil cult that would do as well. But the Sabbath—ah, for that they have been gathering from places no man knows the name for—even from Panama and beyond in the caverns of South America they have come to the Sabbath of Ontal, for it is famous among them all. The city is full of strange wild cultists from everywhere the name of Ontal has become known. If we got the poison into that feast it would surely do the life of the whole cavern world more good than by any other trick we could pull."

"Well, Tim, that is my idea, and the first step is a risky bit of work for which you are better fitted than myself. If you get stuck with it, it will mean the death of all of us and no mistake. But it must be done!"

"I'll manage it, Brack, tell me."

"You know what my thought-concealer is and why we keep it in reserve so the coppers are not on to its use. Since there are so few records suitable for such a small reader as is in this headpiece there are few who would understand what my invention was if they saw it."

"What is the job, Brack, and why wear the concealer, we do well enough ordinarily without it?"

"Because I'm sending you to Lura's place to get the mysterious poison she used, before the lazy coppers get around to searching the place thoroughly. You know how thick-headed Bonur's cops are, and it may be they never got it through them that Lura really had a poison, or never understood it must be hidden somewhere in her rooms. If we can get to the stuff we may be able to wipe out all the men who make our lives miserable with one use of it, instead of

many trips to the well, as Lura used it."

"I get your idea, Brack. You want me to wear your thought record of me doing some work on Lura's mech, as if I didn't know she were dead and were doing something she ordered before she died—diddle-daddle with her sewing machine or what-have-you, and come back with the poison."

"I'LL watch you all the time from our metal room and I'll be able to stave off any trouble you might get into. It is a big risk, for the coppers might just have 'left' the stuff there as a trap to catch anybody who happens to get the idea I have. But I'm gambling our lives on the chance that the cops never proved that Lura *had* a poison, that the deaths were anything but accident, and that the big-shots had Lura killed just in case. With their usual stupidity, they should be leaving Lura's place unguarded and deserted. The only reason I'm taking such a gamble is that I never heard of a poison as untraceable, as long in its suspended action, as potent in small doses as the one Lura used. Why, some of her victims died two months after Lura got it to them! That gives us plenty of time to get out of the city after the big feast next week. So, if there is anybody around when you get there, pretend Lura ordered you to fix her stim-mech or something, and that you haven't heard that she died yesterday."

"O.K., Pal! I don't see any great danger in the job. We have pulled worse stunts."

"Tim, the danger lies in that some of the powerful friends of those who died at Lura's hands may be wise to her method, and be using her place as a trap for others of like mind. Bonur himself may be watching the place from a ray on the Stem. How do we know?"

"I'll bring back anything that looks

like it might be a poison—her face powder, her perfume, and if there are any around, some of her photos and maybe a statuette! I've heard of some that are the nuts."

"Never mind the bric-a-brac, Tim; get the poison, and if everything goes all right, Bonur will be pushing up daisies inside a month. That is worth the effort and risk, Tim. It is doubtful if the thieves have dared to enter to loot as yet. I suspect that even the police would not like to be caught there by certain people if they suspect the truth of the deaths that followed Lura's loves. The big-shots may be looking for the poison. You're taking a big risk, and don't forget it for a minute! And on second thought, Tim, bring me a photo of her—dancing—the way she used to be when things were well with her. I want it for my personal collection."

"No bric-a-brac, eh, Brack! I'll bring anything that will keep her memory alive—the woman who dared do what the men of Ontal failed to do."

"Get going, Tim! You may be covered by the Helpers, or by some friend of ours, as well as myself from here. Get going, man!"

**D**OWN the dark, blue-lit ways traveled the old rollat which Tim and Brack had resurrected from Ontal's dump long before. Rollats were almost numerous, but one could not buy them—most antique mech which is still in working condition is hard to come by for several obvious reasons. It just isn't built any more. But such men as Tim and Brack were sometimes in possession of immensely valuable samples of the old machine art because of their knowledge, their ability to repair such intricate devices as the ancients constructed—where richer men were not able to acquire them.

Past the marvels of marble known as

the "Sea People's Fountain," where the mermen stretched their flippers endlessly over the arcing water sprays of the fountain of the ancient allied race of the sea—with their name that looked like "Mistmen" carved in the antique letters still discernible in the ancient stone. Past the great statue of the Goddess of Sleep, of blue transparent stone that sparkled inwardly with mysterious fires like stars set in the night sky, stone that was shaped into a gigantic and exquisite woman who seemed to strew sleep over the city with her great graceful hands.

Over the Bridge of the Dead; past the glittering yellow stone of the palace of the forgotten Queen Hynay the Golden; past the tremendous green faces of the "Square of the Kings" where the terrible wisdom carved into the visages of the ancient rulers of Bakt looked out over the whole vast bowl of Ontal: the awful deeps of character engraved in their faces was a thing that never failed to thrill and shiver the soul of the passer—on rolled the ancient conveyance, its indestructible atomic motor purring as sweetly as ever it did in the past when it was born of the clever hands of the God-like men of forgotten ancient time.

Up to the "Place of the Heterae" as the building was still called, and for which the place was still used, where Lura had been one of the beauties there quartered. For all the high-class entertainers and dancers were made to live in this tremendous edifice where they might be handy to the wants of the "powers that be."

**T**HE rollat purred to a halt in the darkness of the passage between the Place of the Heterae and the "Home of the Blinded." In the dark gloom cast by the shadow of the gloomy old "Home" (for even the workers of that

far past had their accidents sooner or later in the endless lives their medicinal science gave them so that the legend of their immortality still is remembered today), Tim parked the rollat in the shadow of the overhanging stone monster of stone that graced the weird architecture of the great pile. Grabbing his bag of tools, Tim Shanter scuttled across the dim alley cavern into the dark doorway, up the slim winding stairs that led to the service doors of the rich heterae. A couple of revelers passed him on the stairs, with ribald references to his dirty clothes, drunkenly thinking him one of themselves seeking the favors of some beauty who sold her charms. Up to the top that was not the top, *for no building of the ancients ceases to ascend up and up into the rock within the limitations of one man's strength*. Up to the door marked Lura 198—and tried the door with a shaking hand.

Fear gripped Tim and the humming inside his head from Brack's thought-concealer only heightened his fear. Its obscuring thought impulses added to his own its constant reminder of his danger. But nothing alarmed him as the door swung open under his hands manipulating the set of picklocks he knew well how to use. He let himself into the apartment of the sweet beguiler and poisoner of the worst of the evil men of the city—Lura—perhaps the greatest figure, and surely the greatest dancer, of her time in all Ontal.

Sweet she looked down from her statue, life colored, poised above the fire rods of the heat place. Sweet, yes—but much more: the artist had caught the idealistic flame that was the life in Lura, the sheer courage that animated every line of her, the utter cunning that had made her able to do what she had for the oppressed of Ontal. On the walls were several paintings of her. Tim

knew she had probably paid some needy artist lavishly for them, for she was noted for her generosity. And Tim imagined the artist refusing the needed money, for she was well loved by all who knew her well.

Soft were the hangings that glittered iridescent over the walls. Her bed—a great sculptured couch of the ancients, not a cheap work bought in modern times—flashed with a million of the tiny, magical “sleep-stones” that gave off the subtle rays from reflected light that can give sleep to the most restless, do they gaze at them a short while.

The bed was carved antelopes couchant, holding their horns upright for the four posts that drooped downward a curtain of soft fire—the fabric called Cammetta—that is ever scented with some fabulous forgotten magic odor that makes a man want woman more than life. And embroidered over the shifting fire of the fabric were many queer flowers and poppys and little, forgotten beasts of strange unknown kinds sleeping among them—and other sleepy dreams from some artist's time-vanished hand.

All this was pain to Tim, for his starved soul relished such beauty as a man on a desert relishes the oasis, and it was sheer pain to have to disregard all the beauty and hasten about his job. He had no time for the beauty which Lura had so loved and had given her life to protect and help to grow again in the lives of men.

**Q**UICKLY Tim set about pulling open closets, feeling with his quick fingers for false drawers, and levers that might open secret panels; meanwhile he swung open the rhythm-tone mech that sat at the bedside and set it going. It was a device that changed the basic rhythm at which it was set



into a number of subtly developing variations—a kind of automatic composer of simple dance rhythms of a varied kind that Lura had used in her dancing practice. Now he had an excuse for being there; he could say he was repairing this device as Lura had ordered.

Into his bags went the powders, the perfumes, the whole contents of her cabinets of beauty aids, and as his eyes sought quickly over the room for what could not be what he sought in order to search more closely that which might contain it, his eye fell on her vita-wood desk where her feather-pen stood in its dragon ink-well, trailing a peacock feather aloft as the dragon's tail.

Under the desk his intuitive fingers found a bump where no bump should be, and he pressed. His hands felt a tiny door open under the apparently solid wood of the desk. His eyes searched the outer doors of the apartment fearfully, for now was one moment he would not want to explain to any who might catch him there, for he knew he had found what he sought.

His ears listened, and every faint sound from the huge building full of revelry and far-off muffled whispers and secretive comings and goings seemed the step of the men he feared, the men who obeyed Bonur's least wish (and for whom they would skin the flesh from a man transparent slice by slice). But the silence was real, and his fear left him.

Within the place his fingers had opened stood a round bag full of something, and his heart skipped a beat for it had an odor that spoke death in no uncertain language. It must be very potent, for the very odor of the stuff made him faint and dizzy. Only a little would betray itself instantly, but perhaps she disguised it with some strong perfume mixed in.

He had what he wanted, so he switched off the rhythm-tone, and stole down the stairs that were the way trod by those whom the heterae loved but dared not let be seen enter the front ways for fear of the men who paid their bills. Sometimes the very best blood of the city worshipped here at the shrine so many men have burned their souls before. And well they might, for the ages of evil in Ontal, the centuries just past, and the centuries of life of the people where they had come from to enter the caverns of America—had seen the breeding of slave-women for beauty as horses are bred—to a beauty surpassing the normal of downtrodden Ontal by far. It was of these that Lura was, but dancers are exempt from compulsion to other forms of diversion, except by those who are powerful enough to flout all restrictions and command her.

NOW down and down Tim went, and ever in his ears the clever device of Brack's kept whispering silly nothings—of the delights of hitting a pool ball dead center and seeing the target take its pocket; of swimming in the life-fountain and losing the rheumatism in its strangely vitalized water from the old water-making machine underneath; of going to the circus and seeing the bad criminals be slaughtered and burned and otherwise done away with. And never a whisper in the thought that poured through his head of the fact that the criminals it spoke of were the best blood and brains of the city, men who hated the evil that swallowed all of life enough to fight for them—and got caught at it—and nothing in his thought of his own rage at the misery and crumbs of life that were left him from the destroying rich.

And the mirrors on the landings of the many stairs leered his face back at him

with its pall of fear, his face that was bright red when he was happy, but had not been so for years now.

He tossed the bags in the back of the big rollat and got into the driver's place. Lifting the seat he tucked the poisonous-odorous bag into the place where tools would be if there were tools any more to fit the rollat. Over it he spread his coat and onto the ragged coat he flung some tools: the heavy pipe wrench and a stack of tiny pliers and wrenches for the delicate telaug repair work.

Well, he was safe enough, though he had forgotten to garner many of the jewels that were flung carelessly about Lura's rooms, the emeralds that had swung at her neck, at her navel and at her G-string in the dance of Green Fire; the sapphires of yellow that had blazed at her waist in a wide belt in the "Flame" dance; the ancient priceless jewels given her by the Lord of the Entry long ago that could not possibly be used to cover her at all, but were for her head, her soft column of neck, her wrists and ankles only. Two great old jewels he had picked up with the perfumes from her cabinets and then the things had slipped his mind in the excitement of searching for a hidden place among all the delicate priceless furniture of the favorite dancer's home.

As he swung the old rollat back on the deserted Ontal-way again and headed for the metal room where Brack waited and chewed his stubs of finger nails in Ben Uniatty's lab, he thought with hate of the Lords of the Entry who could order any dancer or woman to dance the most shameless dances and endure the most revolting degradations while those same Lords closed the dance halls to the people if even a little bare skin were shown, who pretended to deplore the trend toward vulgarity although it had been always the way of

the underworld to be shameless and pagan in its pleasures—till the later time of the ruler before Bonur who had hypocritically condemned all pleasure on the grounds of vulgarity, but in truth purely through a desire to be cruel. And how at first they had been glad when Bonur had killed him and taken the Stem for his own, but they had learned differently.

Tim boiled still as he remembered the smug way the powerful ones laughed at the people who might not ever enjoy the beauty of the dancers or see the heterae or any beauty of any kind but must only be allowed to see them as they died. And now that was worse than the one before Bonur. For, just as Lura had died in the flames of the stake at the circus for the entertainment of the people who had loved her and known her heart was good, so had others they loved best. And he thought of the ancient Palace of Love of the old ones that had been a theatre for so many years down here—why once even the Indians had used the Palace of Love for a temple to their great spirit—and here the sachems had come secretly to worship at the shrine of the ancients. And when the white men had come they had kept the secret from him, but the men of the underworld of Europe had come too and had driven them at last from this hiding place as well.

NITA had danced there before Bill had met and loved her, and he recalled how he himself had loved Nita, though he had never told her, and had spent all his money going night after night to see her dance—and how the Lords had closed the ancient Palace of Love because the dances were lewd, and the ancient statuary "too frank" in its exposition of the nature of animal love, of spiritual love, and genuine love. While all the time they had

done the thing only to deprive the people of the things they liked best themselves so that they could point to a pleasureless people and say to their sycophants "There, but for my favor, goes yourself: without pleasure and without dance or the sight of woman to gladden your eyes; without love songs or any erotic relief from dull living; without the dream-maker's beauties to gladden you—be faithful and spiritless and you will not have to join them, but work against me and you will become one of the spiritless workers."

As Tim drove the hate grew in his breast and he growled. Most of all he hated the hypocritical phrases they put upon such deeds as "virtue winning over the ancient vice"—that the dances of the underworld, so old as to be ritual, so frankly worshipping of Astarte and Aphrodite to be not lewd but spiritual, was the worst insult of all. And he wondered if the surface men were so evil in their so-called goodness and he wished that they were not. For he saw their newspapers sometimes and knew their leaders were often guilty of the same hypocrisy of forbidding the people what they loved themselves, while they raided those lesser places where the lesser people indulged.

But Tim did not know that evil is a repetition ever, and makes the same pattern wherever it goes, in great or less degree, yet the same. But Tim knew that though it did not seem so, the worst evil these evil ones did to the people was to kill their pleasure and make their life too dull to bear.

As he turned the corner past that long-vacant palace of the ancient worship of the goddess of Love, he thought of the priceless stim apparatus that stood beside the antelope bed of Lura, and knew that it must be the gift of some light-fingered one from among the rich class—for stim was forbidden

everywhere except in the homes of the very rich and powerful. Such as Lura could only get it by paying most of their "take" to the stim monopoly, who had taken most of the stim mech's antique magic and stored it in vaults. Tim realized that Lura had been far from friendless to be so privileged as to have a jewel encrusted stim-mech beside her bed, for such privileges were won by few. Who had taken it from the vaults for her but one of those who guard the vaults from the many who would die for a taste of the forbidden pleasures?

Tim thought back of the time when the love palace was every man's right, and the right of the women who had made of love a religion and a heaven, and of the stim that had been the right of anyone who could press a button and activate the ancient mech that sat everywhere about the city just where the ancients had left it when they went away so long ago. Tim groaned to think of all the present rulers had taken from him and his kind. Once life had been full and rich, now it was empty.

TIM passed the fountains of sleep and drew up before the terrible tower of dread that was the building above the deep chambers where Uniaty had made his home and where Brack waited in the metal rooms that lay deep within. Tim wondered what that black round tower of solid stone had been so long ago that it still should strike such eerie dread to the sense. He entered and wound his way down to the place where Brack waited and pondered how to cause the death of those whom they all hated.

"Tim, old pal! I see by your face that you have found the fearful stuff that Lura made her life, and that cost her life."

"Aye, Brack, that I did. 'Twas hid-



den well in a secret part of her desk, wrapped with wire it was, to look like a set of coils for some gadget to any spying penetray, that is why it was never noticed. 'Twill be hard to disguise as a seasoning for their mindless cooks; it has a bad smell."

"We have done harder tricks than that, Tim! Ben Uniaty has some contact with the Helpers; he will have a way and a mind to figure out that and more beside."

## CHAPTER VI

### Reunited—And Work to Do

"THE mind," Bonur began, strutting a little and imitating wiser men he had heard give similar discourses, "is an electrical mechanism, as well as a record of past events; an electrical record."

Bill Flores looked askance at Bonur. It was incongruous to hear this gross creature break into an apparently technical discourse. But Bonur had had opportunities, and was not too stupid to take advantage of them. He had learned much from wiser men, men now dead, some at his hand. He had a superficial knowledge of the physics of the ancient mech in some part and what it was designed to do, as well as all the perverted uses to which it had been put since the long-ago when it was built.

Bill, after being admitted to the office of Benz the rodite, and soon thereafter arrested and thrown in prison, was now called before Bonur for questioning. Bill knew that Bonur was being very pleasant in hopes of allaying his suspicion and fear and making him talk freely. Bill realized that he had been arrested only because his name was his father's, and his father the brother of Pyotyr Flores. Then too, for all Bill knew, Bonur might have been the man who killed his father

when he was a child. It had been someone in the palace, someone pumping his father as to the use of certain mech—and Bonur had acquired much of his education that way, from unwilling teachers. And his father had been an expert with and a collector of curious kinds of antique mech, and would have made a ripe victim for Bonur's school. Then, too, the watch ray had caught something of his Bill's, thoughts, and knew he was planning trouble. But after all, thinking about it and doing it were two different things. Most of the people of Ontal wished Bonur and all his works to the devil for that matter.

Bonur continued with his discourse, the guards stood gravely at the door of the great room, the huge ro-mech at which Bonur was gesturing loomed before them in all its mystery of antique lost wisdom, its inhuman complexity; and Bill, like most others of the underworld who knew anything, knew that Bonur—no more than others—could build or even repair one bit of the ancient intricacy. Men like Brack and Tim were few and their secrets well guarded from generation to generation as well as they might where every thought may be read at any time over a ray. As for that, you can watch a plumber forever, but you will not learn to wipe a joint until you go to work for him. As Bonur went on with his discourse, strutting his superficial knowledge of the ancient science, a trim little slave girl tripped into the room and stood waiting nearby as if sent for.

Like most slaves of the caverns, she wore the ancient slave garb, a kind of Assyrian tunic, black, short and flare-skirted—an uncomfortable rig at best, but who worried about a slave's comfort? Some things never change in the caves.

"To one who has explored the inner

workings of the mind with the visio-telaug—Bonur slurred the word as if not sure how to pronounce it—"the whole mental set-up called character can be reconstructed in any desired way by reimpresing all the records of the mind, all the fine films of sensitive flesh, with new and different summations from observed phenomena, can change the whole rule book by which the mind reasons out its action. I will demonstrate on little Sarah here; she has been disobedient, careless of my welfare. Come, Sarah."

**R**ELUCTANTLY Sarah came forward, on her face a rebellious, independent and fearful expression. She dreaded what he was going to do to her.

"To show you what her character is now, a perhaps normal character but not one apt to be useful to me because she has decided I am not her friend. I will give her a few commands.

"Sarah, bite your arm till it bleeds!"

Sarah merely stared at him, did not obey.

"Sarah, strike the stranger between the eyes with your fist."

Sarah only kept staring wonderingly at Bonur, simply refusing such an incongruous order.

"You can see, Flores, that as a perfect tool, little Sarah leaves much to be desired. Help yourself to the sweets there on the table, Sarah."

Sarah got herself a handful of the bonbons, stood eating them.

"Now seat yourself at the instrument, my little sweetheart."

Bill's stomach turned, for he realized what was coming. He would have to watch it! But the girl obediently set herself in the great seat of strangely worked metal far too big for a human.

A ring of concentrically focused beams played on the girl's head where

she sat, showing transparently blue and grey like pale flames, making of the yellow curls a weird nimbus about her head. On the twelve-foot screen at the side of the mech all the little thoughts of her brain showed separately as pictures, and one could hear, too, all the abstract roots of those complicated thought pictures working out into the complete thoughts that were the result of Sarah's rather simple but good mind at work.

Bonur directed an intense beam of blue absorbitive ray upon her head, and made a swift adjustment of the dials below the screen. Instantly all the little patterns of intricately related thought-pictures changed, ran together, disappeared. Softly Sarah slumped, unconscious in the great seat.

Now, in place of the pictures and the thought heard before, began a new series of thoughts and memories from the record Bonur had started rotating in its spool within the mech. It was a record carefully prepared for this purpose, and all the obliterated scenes in her memory's screens were replaced now by its carefully prescribed memories. One could see the process horribly replacing the whole soul and self of the young girl; and read the purport of the thought as it was inscribed steadily on the mind that would no longer be her own, but a poor imitation of the real thing.

Nearly half an hour went by as the record repeated all its implied and intentional changes of logic; and the causes of future syllogism from past observed facts of nature were now all different. Bill knew her future acts would be based on an entirely new and simpler set of memories designed to produce the desired character—one wholly obedient to the whims of Bonur.

Sarah was at last released from the machine. She arose and stood before

Bonur, a foolish, doglike attitude of devotion and subjugation on her face.

"Bite yourself, Sarah!"

Sarah bent her fair head and sank her white teeth savagely in her own arm. The blood trickled down her wrist and dripped on the floor as she released the round young arm from her red-stained teeth.

"Strike Flores, here, between the eyes with your fist."

Bill got his hand in the way of the blow just in time.

"You see," Bonur turned to face Bill, "from now on she will do only as I command in a way she is sure will please me. I know because I myself am the author of every thought in her whole memory—all others have been destroyed, wiped out completely. All her action in the future will be a product of my own design, from a life-time of study of the mind."

**B**ILL began to get the gist of the man's egoistic exhibition. He had never thought of the gross Bonur as a student, but it was evident that Bonur himself did think more highly of his mind than others gave him credit for. Bill sighed as he realized that this madman—a sadist, a moron, the leader of an evil cult that spread death and misery through the far-flung caverns—yet represented the highest, perhaps, development of science in the underworld. And the underworld has very different and greater opportunities by far than the surface world; insofar as the ancient mech is ready-made wisdom direct from the ancients who were far wiser than men. This was a rotten use to which his learning was put: to rob a girl of her young mind and replace it with the spirit of a yes-man, of a human robot.

Bonur was still talking, and though Bill was a little mystified yet as to why

he had been called there since Bonur had not mentioned his recent half-formed plan—his immature impulse to find a way to rid Ontal of such things as Bonur—this mystery was fast clearing up. Bill listened to the rest of Bonur's bragging exposition in an agony of apprehension . . . did he intend to put him in the condition in which he had left Sarah or no?

"Her whole logic is a gift from my record, she has no other. The effect will wear off in time, but in a year or so I can play the record on her mind again and get the same result."

Bonur reached out and touched the girl's head with his fat black-bristled fingers, and her whole body wriggled ecstatically and shamelessly like a puppy's. She was obviously his completely devoted slave.

"Such a process is what I am going to do to you!" Bonur's smile was a sinister delight upon his face, his enjoyment the apex of the performance, what he had been working for. The sinking of the barb within the victim's flesh was the moment of joy for which he lived, to see the stricken look of the victim who knows there is no escape.

"When I get through, you are going to sign over your rights to Flore's holdings. Then you are going to go out and find the rest of your gang, and see what you can learn about such attempts to do away with me as you evolved in your mind. The mind that evolved that plan will cease to exist as such, and exist hereafter only as a dim memory of the far past, the extremely hazy past. A time when you did not know how to get along in the world. Getting along, now, will in your mind depend wholly on how well you serve my interests—and reward for your efforts will not enter your thoughts." Bonur's voice suddenly lost its silk and turned harsh, shrilly triumphant.



"Get into that seat, you young fool! You'll not be the man to murder Bonur. Sit down!"

Bill shuffled slowly forward. He could see no point in resisting, for several of Bonur's bullies lounged in the far doorway and he knew there was a roomful of armed men beyond for he had seen them on his way here. Besides, there were the slaves, standing about the room like near-nude statues, to put him into the mechanism's seat.

Bill put out his hand to reach the great arm of the ancient metal seat . . . when, as at a signal a strange, sudden *hum* came dramatically into the room from somewhere far outside!

Bonur leaped back, throwing up his hand, his mouth a round, startled "o" of ruby, revolting flesh. His whole face had swiftly become a mask of abject fear. The hum rose steadily to a deadly, insupportable whine—and Bill clapped his hands to his head, only to feel a mighty force tearing not only at his brain, but at every fiber of his body. The whole gloomy, rocky beauty of the ancient throne chamber of a forgotten God twisted into a deadly whirl and disappeared. Himself became a nothing, a flying nothing that did not think or know but felt terribly that it was no more existent.

**B**ILL opened his eyes to see a stranger's bearded face bending solicitously over him.

"Where am I?"

"You are a long way from Bonur Golz. He may be ruler of this God-forsaken hole in the ground called Ontal, but he isn't ruler of this particular part of it. He has enough slaves and I can use a few well-meaning creatures like yourself. So I turned this ancient teleport mech on Bonur's private little hell, just as though I were an ancient scientist and knew what I was doing.

But in truth I am just another man who usually wonders just what *will* happen when I push one of these time-forgotten buttons."

"Teleportation?" Bill's voice was a bit awed. "I had heard that such mech existed, but since Bonur's ban on the use of any mech, we of the lower classes have not had much chance to know the nature of the ancient mech."

"You're not lower class!" The bearded man was smiling at Bill hospitably, but his mind was obviously somewhere else.

"I have become so, since my father's death and now my uncle's at Bonur's hands. My father had quite a store of the rare kinds of mech. He collected peculiar and little known types of machinery from all the far caves and was expert at its use. But Bonur, I guess, wanted his wonder mech, and did not want my father alive. Anyway he died or disappeared some years ago, and we could never find a trace of him. So we laid it at Bonur's door and went on living. Now he has killed my uncle."

"I know your history, son. Yes, it was Bonur killed your father, after long weeks of torment in his telaugs to get the last iota of information on what he knew of his machines. But let me introduce my fellow conspirators. First we must conceal the teleport, just in case."

The old man pulled a lever in the wall. The tall metal enigma of intricate, impossible construction sank slowly into the floor. About it as it sank Bill could see the shimmer of mercury, which finally covered it entirely.

"Why the mercury?" asked Bill.

"Same diffraction as the metal of the teleport—to pentrays. These walls are of the impenetrable metal of the ancient's ray armor, but there do exist some samples of the rare ray-mech de-

signed to penetrate just this metal. Bonur has one of these rare mech. He keeps it in his vaults, which protects us, as he gives a look only occasionally and finds nothing wrong, for we are forewarned by men who watch him and others with similar rare rays. Bonur is going now to get his private ray out and start his own private search for us. He will not find anything because that type of ray will not convey thought through this metal, and the rays that will penetrate visually do so imperfectly and hence things hidden as this mech is in mercury seem but solid blocks of opacity—or of glass—all a shimmer with unseeableness. That is why the mercury. It conceals nearly anything sunk in it from such rays because of its particular kinship to the metal of the teleport mech. We use it thus to hide many things. We have our ways, which you will learn before you become of use to us."

Through the door came a familiar long-nosed slim man, smiling with his rotten teeth.

"This fellow," the bearded man continued, "is Brack Longen. Ah, you have met before! I am surprised. I must be getting very forgetful. And this woman is called Nita—and a very beautiful girl she is too—who sat and starved because she thought you were dead! Ah, I see you have met before! And I had meant to introduce Tim Shanter here, but I see you are too busy kissing Nita to pay any attention to the red-haired grease monkey anyway. You have probably met him too, I suppose."

Old Ben Uniaty was laughing as he withdrew from the chamber of the teleport and beckoned to Brack and Tim to leave the reunited lovers alone.

"OH, BILL, it has been years, it seemed! But only a short week or two, I guess, really."

"It has been years for me, Nita, and I have lost track of time, too. I know I have acquired a head of grey hair, by the feel of it."

"I have too, you big lug!" Her arms went around him and that glorious feeling that is always present when two meet after long absence swallowed their separate selves in oneness.

Outside, the bearded one and Brack were talking.

"I can't understand teleportation. It seems to me matter must be destroyed to become a part of a ray that penetrates even rock."

"It is a miraculous mechanism that I don't fully understand myself. But you must have noticed in using penetrays at one time or another that they have a faculty of picking up odors—turpentine, chlorine, or worse—and carrying the odor along with them even through miles of rock?"

"Yes, I swung a penetray into a skunk one night when I was surreptitiously helping the surface men search for a lost child in a wood over-head. I was stank out properly."

"Stunk," corrected Tim, listening.

"Well, it smelled so bad I couldn't return to the search for nearly an hour. Stank or stunk, a penetray will carry an odor."

"Well, the ancients must have observed this phenomena early in their work with penetrative rays and developed its potential use as the years went by. From it they finally developed a way of sending things over long distances by ray. They seem to have a ray that dissolves matter. The penetrays carry the components back over the return path—you know how the double rays work as a full circuit. The scanner, tuned to the subject, in this case Bill, reassembles the matter in its original pattern in the chamber of the mech. The whole thing happens so swiftly that

death does not result if the object is carefully brought into tight focus. You remember the care with which I adjusted the focus upon the chair while the girl was in it? It was temptation not to steal Bonur's favorite slave girl. But I cannot pull the stunt too often, and was afraid Bonur would do Bill in before I got a chance to get him too. It is the telesolidograph screen which makes the whole possible and you are as familiar with that screen as I am."

"I wish we had one of the ancient race's techs for a few days, eh. Long enough to clean up this sink called Ontal."

"Maybe we can do the job ourselves, Brack. Your latest plan looks good to me."

"Look, instead of slipping that poison to the cooks, which is a poor plan at best, why not impregnate the meat with the poison through the use of the teleport?"

"Brack, I am afraid of the odor. That stuff has a mean smell—and besides the teleport is selective; it won't send everything. If there were minerals of certain kinds, the obscuring odorous material we use to cover up the poison might also be left out as well as some necessary part of the poison composition. The substance might thus be changed. The mech is peculiarly designed for certain purposes and for no others. It is adjusted carefully by the ancients for inclusion of everything necessary to life, it leaves out nearly all else. For instance, such a teleportation was used by the ancients for a health treatment because it leaves out toxic materials of certain kinds. They had the mech so adjusted by field attunement inside. For instance it makes a young man younger, and an old man young again because the body that has passed through its magnetic tortion and rearranging does not any longer contain the age-causing

radioactives which it had at the sending end. You know my age, Brack?"

"Why, I had thought 45 or so. How old are you?"

"I was 85 yesterday. Due solely to yearly teleportations of just a few feet distance with the mech. That is one reason I keep it concealed in its bath of mercury."

"God, it is the long sought secret of the ancient's immortality!"

"It is one of them, Brack. That is why I do not want these evil overlords of ours to get it. Even death would not rid us of them, then. They would live on and on—always evil! It would mean the end of all future hope for men if evil got immortality before good."

"BEN, I have read in old stories of medieval times how the elves and the goblins—the antics of cavern people imitating such things, I mean—played with the people above ground by teleporting them and levitating them. The ancient custom of Walpurgis when we and the surface followers all worshipped together in some secluded spot, and the custom included transportation for the surface people to the place by either teleportation or levitation, depending on whether the invited one was outdoors or indoors. When the invited one remained indoors, teleportation was used, as taking them through doors and windows by levitation was apt to be seen and commented on to their detriment, as well as the fact the closed windows and doors were often in the way."

"Yes, once much more of this mech was in common use, down here. But

<sup>4</sup> Just another reason why modern techs must get down into the caves and clean it out—the modern evil down there is hot on the trail of just that secret, which would mean the end of hope for the future of men, in truth. At present the worst are said to use baby blood transfusions to fight age.—AUTHOR.



misuse and destruction has made many kinds of mech rare. It is too sad that we have not the surface world's organizations of a benevolent nature to organize and study and understand and the science that lies in such machines, and save it for the future as well as make us all wiser and healthier and infinitely longer-lived by its use."

"But speaking of the poison, you think to place it in the meat by teleport just wouldn't work?"

"No, it just wouldn't."

"Well, we can get it to the cooks anyway. And then goodbye to the whole mess in the Stem palace!"

"And once more the Stem will be open to travel to the surface by anyone with business on the surface."

"But, if we open the Stem to the knowledge of the surface, the reactionaries in other cavern cities who now keep the ancient secret would attack us?"

"I think not. Soon similar plans will be afoot in every important settlement over the whole continent. Something different for all of us will come of it."

"One would think so. It must be all very carefully arranged, and the coup only known of by men like ourselves. You are to tell only those whose lives are already forfeit to the rulers if captured—those whose nature is, like ours, wholly oppositional to the nature of the evil bosses."

"Explain the teleport some more—I would understand it. I might have to fix one for my use some day."

"Well, they developed this carrying of atoms through rocks and other solids until they could blast a solid with ray of such great pressure that the solid melted, flowed between the force lines of the rays—was carried along the path of the ray to its destination. There, when the pressure of the ray was removed by a counter force-flow, the sub-

stance was deposited as matter again."<sup>5</sup>

**B**ILL and Nita came through the doorway beneath the great carven mermaids into the metal chamber where the bearded man waited between Brack and Tim. Bill bowed low before him in a manner little seen these days, but once much used among the elder folk of the cavern world when evil was less the way of life, and benevolence and wisdom more.

"Your name, I take it, is Ben Uniaty. I was told by friends long ago:—when in trouble go about with the thought, 'I want Ben Uniaty' and you will soon find a way to help me unseen. I had forgotten, or else you had heard from me long ago."

"We did not know the straits you and Nita were in. You said nothing, you

<sup>5</sup> Rocks can be sent through rocks, which seems impossible, because of the nature of telesolidograph focus which brings the pressure to bear only at the focus of all the rays. They are no longer rocks under ray pressure: their parts elongate, stretch, become like photons or sub-photons, are carried along as part of the ray flow. So it is that matter may be sent along a ray to be precipitated once again—the scanning apparatus directs a small flow of this dissolving ray over the focus of the teleport solidograph receiver, unseen at the subject's end of the ray but visible in the screen as a solid. Apparently the whole thing happens within the screen, but in reality tremendous forces are under remote control at the other end of the ray and as the scanner dissolves the solidograph image in the screen, the matter disappears at the other end. If the thing happened slowly, living matter could not survive the long time-interval—it would bleed as the ray tore it away bit by bit and reassembled it at the other end.

The heart of the thing is a scanner of intricate and rapid nature, coupled with the telesolidograph which makes an image of anything upon which it is focused, anywhere in three dimensions. The scanner controls the dissolving ray at that end, and likewise controls a duplicate scanner which contains a precipitating ray which neutralizes the pressure of the ray bearing the matter, and thus causes a precipitation which is controlled entirely by the speed and quantity of the pickup scanner at the other end—though both scanners are located right in the machine. That is as near as I can come to describing the apparatus to you.—Author.

appeared now and then, we thought nothing of you. When we learned, it was too late."

"I want earn my way here, to pull my weight. You fellows are taking tremendous risks in what you do, and I think I have an idea where your work tends. I want to be part of it."

"We both do," said Nita.

"You both will," said Ben Uniatty. I do not risk or use my treasured immortality for nothing. You must be of value to me to repay me, for the risk I take is much greater than a mortal one. Remind me, Nita, to send you through the teleport for a short distance so that you do not age at a greater rate than Bill. So long as you are my people, you will be sent through the mech at regular intervals to preserve your youth. The transportation leaves behind the cause of age.

"You may not go out of these metal walls even for an instant. Everyone in here has either been brought by the teleport or has very carefully guarded his thought on the way here. Since we are embarking on this enterprise, we plan on sealing up all the doors entirely with impervious metal, and going in and out entirely by the teleport. That is the only way to be sure we are safe here. But we may decide to leave the city entirely. It depends on the way things go. Meanwhile, no trips out to rummage about through the deserted levels as all of us love—to search for the time-forgotten wonders of our elder race. No, you *must* not—it is a firm order!"

"We will not," said Nita sweetly, and Bill nodded affirmation.

"Now to work, both of you. First, for Bill there is an assembly to which some odd parts are missing. Brack will go and search for the rest of the mech when he knows what to look for. As your father's son you are a valuable man, Bill. You can tell Brack what to

get to furnish me with many new mech.

"For Nita, there is cooking, and when we relax there is dancing for us to do. I surmise Nita will soon become the most valuable thing in our lives. We are well supplied; I steal stocks of food from the stores of the brigand rulers of the city—and they never miss them. The slaves are afraid to report anything missing for fear they will be blamed.

"Brack, you have your errand. The day of the feast draws near, time is short. Get it done, and I will stand guard with the watch-ray so that nothing happens. The hour is almost at hand but two more—and you must be there or I cannot help get the thing done. On your way!"

Once again the great teleport mech rose from its bed of quicksilver and Brack stepped into the sending chamber within the metal of the mech. Ben Uniatty pressed a stud, and Brack disappeared as if by magic. It *was* magic, the same ancient magic which has been worked by hidden men like Old Ben Uniatty, and by others like Bonur Golz, since the first Egyptian pressed the first bricks out of wet clay and straw. For it was such a one as him who gave the Pharaoh frogs and blood and death for his first born to release his people, the Jews, so long ago.

The tradition is an old one and the mech to do such miracles has suffered much, but the caverns are vaster in extent than the surface world by far, and no man knows what may be found by search in the intricate endless warrens of darkness. So always, though the mech is destroyed by fearful men to prevent anyone using it to kill them, there is more of the wonder machines to be found and used against such a Pharaoh, or against a modern Bonur.

**A**T THE same time that Brack was setting out on his journey, Bonur

Golz sat peering up into the dark water of Long Island Sound with a long range penetray. Up there in the dark water a space ship had landed—unseen, quiet, drifting down like a falling leaf. Inside some strange, kind people were listening with their instruments to the radio reports of the war and the peace conference. An officer said to another—“Fighting lubbers!”<sup>6</sup>

“Fighting lubbers, these earthmen! Makes one want to give them a hand. They seem to mean well about their world peace.”

Beside him his wife spoke. “Let me read one of their minds—one who has never known that anyone could peer inside and read his thought. Oh—he senses me, he blushes and looks around. It is a darling mind—it is perfectly open. What an innocent such a mind is. It never has concealed a thought!”

Even as they talked, Bonur reached up with the great space-ray weapon inside the Stem palace and wiped out all the life in the ship. Bonur had no wish for these visitors to contact surface men—for their weapons in the hands of surface men meant trouble and taxes and interference and war to Bonur. It was custom so to destroy all who might bring the two worlds together.

That same hour that Bonur murdered the big ship-load of strangers in the Sound, and left the space ship lie there in the dark, deep water never to be known by any but himself, a rich young she-devil of his acquaintance was putting out the life and flame of liberty burning in the breast of a young man of Ontal. Very slowly she burned his life

away, asking always, “Are you loyal?” and answered always, “Only to the sane!”

She knew what he meant, for none of Ontal ever pretended that the bunch of madmen who had seized control of the Stem under Bonur were sane. For Bonur was the best and sanest of them all, and even so was a mad beast. They were very stupid, very cruel, and very active in their oppression, killing all who showed the slightest disposition to resent their innumerable and constant injuries.

Just before she finished him off by playing live steam over his dying body, he shrieked, “And I had hoped!”

He meant that it was futile to hope for anything but misery and death in the underworld, and he was right regarding those parts of it with which he was familiar of late years. He meant that he felt those idealists who try to keep the flame of revolt for liberty alive—the flame of effort toward a better life for the miserable lesser members—were false dreamers who had misled him. But he was wrong, for we must try.

Not far above the dying man, on the surface, another young man lay sleeping. From Max, where his rollat was parked just outside the City of Ontal beside the Stem way, a ray reached up and touched the young man’s head. From another direction Max sent a ray toward the woman who was torturing the “traitor” to death, and transferred the sensations of torment into sleeping thoughts of the young man of surface New York.

The dream died out and left him gasping, flat in the bed and wondering where he had been to get such a case of sunburn. He was burned, he thought—and he felt himself all over—every inch of his skin should have been fiery red and sore as a boil. His relief at finding his pain had been a dream was short lived.

<sup>6</sup> By lubbers is meant men not knowing space travel—space lubbers. They speak English (there are many traveling space who do speak English) having left earth centuries ago on space ships from the cavern’s stores and never returned to earth. The strange visitors were English-speaking wanderers of space, accidentally coming back to the place their forefathers left.—AUTHOR.



For even as his exploring, fearful hands felt of his body, the heat began to increase, and he was not dreaming. Dreams are darn funny things when they keep on after you wake up! He tried to get up, but the heat was increasing—and he could not rise! In a few minutes he died, his whole body a smoldering char. His night-dress was not even scorched when the coroner examined the charred corpse.<sup>7</sup>

**D**EEP under the house where the man died of a dream, Max, the mad little ghoulish who represented quite a large part of the evil life of the caves, Max, the sub-human with a fat belly and round pursed mouth and fat hips and womanish look, laughed and laughed at the mystification on the faces of the people as to how a man burned to death in his own bed without even scorching the bed or his own night clothes. And the insane little ghoulish left the old induction-ray mech with the "burning" button he had found still running its ray up into the rock above, though he had shifted it to a lower level so that they should not learn about it above. Then he went off to search beside the old aqueduct for a big white lizard to stay his hunger till he had a chance to bargain with the trader in Ontal for food for his gems.

Also searching the watercourse that brought Ontal's water into her fountains and into the basins that flowed in the houses were some of the starving of Ontal who had no love for such as Max. And it was not long before Max was roasting over a spit—for desperation has few squeams. Max had known better than to leave the screen of his weapon ray—but he had been hungry.

Tonight was the feast of the Satanists, in the palace of the Stem. Max would

not be there. Several other visiting evil ones found their way into the cook-pots of Ontal men. And the fact that Bonur guaranteed them safe conduct was enough to cause their death; and hunger is hunger.

But the Cultists came as ever. The city was filling up with them, and the police were busy protecting them—very busy! For if they were understood anywhere, it was in Ontal, where they gathered for their annual Sabbath.

Over all Ontal hung a blanket of evil thought from their interlocking telaug beams, as they watched everywhere for the attacks that among them were nearly continuous, for men like them are always on the watch. And their thought was utterly not good, as it watched and argued and gloated over Ontal.

Those same days before the feast a rheumatic fever that had been festering and killing in a town in Carolina moved northward, a victim here, a fatality there, and an old doctor watched its progress and wondered why it had ceased attacking people in his town and moved so rapidly northward. But that it had some human agency behind it was of course too ridiculous an idea to talk of to anyone.

But I wish the good doctor could have seen the mad little wight who rolled slowly along in a rollat the size of a circus van; and seen the collection of weird apparatus he had gathered in his wanderings through the endless wonder-world of the caverns. Then he might have believed that a disease can be simulated by a combination of rays. Yes, it might have occurred to him—but that there was a reason for the terrible series of painful deaths from rheumatic fever he would not have learned, for the mad little man driving the rollat had no reason in his own mind. Reason had been bred out of his makeup by a long line of

<sup>7</sup> See the notes of Charles Fort for several of these deaths.—AUTHOR.

mad, wild wanderers of the caverns. But the lust to kill and torment—that had *not* been bred out, nor had its terrible consequences ever reached his mind. For were not the surface men helpless against him. Yes, they were.

It was this same madman who crashed the plane bearing Carole Lombard and some twenty army officers into the side of a mountain near the California line. That was an enjoyable incident for him, and no one even chased him for it, for he does not exist to the minds of surface men. It required but the easiest sort of "tamper" work with the delicate instruments of the panel in front of the pilot. And his rays that could read the pilot's mind could also direct the needles of his instruments into those patterns most terrifying to the pilot. Terrifying because true when properly manipulated. Ah man, how superior are those of the caverns to us of the surface. Can they not kill us at will?

## CHAPTER VI

### Feast of the Satanists

**N**OT far from the Palace of the Stem was a place that sold beer and wines to the staff of the great house. It stood now nearly empty for it was an hour when most were busy preparing for the great feast of the evil cult that Bonur used as his vehicle to power, his avenues of wide information from the whole cavern world, as well as searchers of the far, deserted and unknown caverns for powerful mech as yet not in his collection.

Inside sat Brack, tonight wearing his thought-hiding device. It was humming inside his head a song that he liked, and he listened to the soft words, taken from an old record that had lain in the metal room when he had moved

in. In his pocket were several little shakers, little containers like salt holders with swivel tops, and in his mind was a hidden purpose—those tops must bare their holes over food for all the evil in Ontal.

Into the room came one of the staff, an under-cook, one of the men for whom he waited. These lowlier of the palace staff were men who been operated upon in the mind, to make them less apt to hate their overlords and hence less apt to be tools for just such a scheme as Brack was hatching. The result of the operation in this case was a man who could not remember what happened yesterday, but who could carry out orders without trouble until tomorrow, when all was forgotten. He was not the best of servants, but his short memory was a useful feature since he forgot any hate for any injury done him. Called *ro*, there are many such, but they are not the same creature that was meant by the ancient word; they are a modern development of the life in the Masked World. Once a man has been cut as was this one, he has little sense or reason, but he does retain such ingrained thought habits as his trade—in this case, cooking.

The cutting of the brain centers to produce such characters is itself a kind of trade, and there are many "cuts" producing different types of "*ro*." Those centers of the brain most apt to cause trouble by independent thinking against their unwelcome masters are "cut" by a penetrative ray that acts somewhat like a surgeon's electric needle. Connecting nerves in the brain are cut. So the man who entered was a thing that was not strictly human. Bonur's device was a variant of a superior method of producing the same result, a man in appearance, but a man who has lost his birthright of reason from a wilful brain mutilation by his master. He can

talk almost naturally, but cannot remember or reason except in the most simple animal-like way. He can ask for beer or tobacco. The constant repetition of such incidents in his daily life has impressed them on his feeble faculties.

As soon as he entered Brack spoke to him, smiling, for such creatures have no suspicions or imagination and accept all things at their surface value.

"Ho, cook, come and drink with me. It is a lonesome business, this sitting down to be merry and finding no one to chaff with."

"Yes, sir," answered the cook, beaming great pleasure to be noticed as a human being, for the "ro" are rather despised members of society, a thing lower than a natural, unmutated slave.

The cook sat his fat body down on the bench beside Brack and smiled, but nothing in his poor mutilated head functioned to make talk, and smiling was as far as he ever got with conversation.

**T**ONIGHT Brack had disguised not only his thoughts so that his mind thought steadily through the tiny record of the mind of a young roustabout rummy of the taverns taken by Brack some weeks before, but his face was carefully disguised to look like another person entirely.

The bitter lines of his mouth and face were smoothed out with a face-wax too thin to be seen, his gray hair was dyed a good black, and his clothing was a flashy young fop's, which did not look out of place on his lean and graceful figure. His long nose was changed with a carefully built up bridge and hook. His thoughts were as idle a bunch of nonsense as ever occupied a man with nothing to do but enjoy an evening from his work—songs and idle nothings. The watch ray took one cursory glance at him and dismissed him from their

minds.

The cook listened raptly to everything Brack said, and as promptly forgot it. Brack entertained him with a long and fulsome discourse on cookery the world over; he had spent several hours reading a cook book called the "World Traveler's Cook Book" to prepare himself for this deed.

Then Brack went into an even lengthier discourse on "seasoning as an art" and wound up with saying that in all his travels he had found but one great perfect flavoring to bring out all the savor of meat—and he had a goodly lot of it in his pocket.

The cook reached out a great red hand and took a pinch from the open shaker in Brack's hand. He smelled it, rubbed it between his fingers, looked at it long, close to his eyes—then held it there before him as he explained that never in all his wide experience with cooking and condiments had he seen anything like it or knew what it might be. Brack was well aware of this, for the cook's mind was far from encyclopedic and every flavor in the encyclopedia was incorporated in the stuff to hide the nauseous odor of the poison.

Brack held his tongue with an effort as the cook popped the stuff into his mouth to get the flavor—and signed his death warrant thereby. But Brack's conscience soothed itself with the hidden thought that many better by far would die did Bonur live on, and Brack let be.

Brack gave him the shakerful of death's powder amid profuse thanks from the humble fellow, then furnished him with a couple of "spares" in case he desired to use it at the feast, so that there would be "plenty to go around" and went on his way swiftly, not wishing to linger there after the deed was done. The only thing left was to remind the nearly mindless fellow over the telaug



beam to place it on the meat this night of Satan's raising, this night when the devil himself came to visit his followers.

THE hour of the feast has arrived, and about the great, gloomy rock chamber hang the decorations for the bloody revels to be held.

The ancient carvings on the walls, polished by the later hands of the good men of Ontal, are smoke-darkened now from the many fires of the recurrent Demon feasts—and every feast an orgy of blood letting for their inverted pleasure senses.

Tonight was to be a greater indulgence in the art of torment for pleasure than any other previous.

In the center of the tremendous, profusely and rather horribly decorated chamber was the great red metal statue of Satan which would tonight be reanimated with the actual force called Satan, and worshipped by the cult.

The decorations, among other horrors, included stuffed human figures—horrible and poorly executed samples of the underworld taxidermy applied to the human.

Slave girls hastened about their task of strewing straw about the floor, of setting all the places with many odd dishes peculiar to the feast, the blood goblets, the finger bowls filled with scented water, the sauces and condiments. The sulphuric perfumes alleged to be present at such events were not present, but instead some very stimulating perfumes were brought for the occasion from the rare stores of unguents and scents of the ancients themselves. Some of these were famous for producing in weak modern men reactions sometimes called panurgic.

The living decorations were all nicely writhing and the stim current flowing into them through the wires of the niches where they hung, so that they

were like statues brought to a strange and terrible activity by some fearful magic—by the terrific stimulation of the ancient life-energy force-flows.

The red lilies of this feast strewed the floor and stood in great vases wherever a place might be found for them, and about the statue of Satan himself rested a great bank of the black lilies of death so dear to his own black heart.

The cook with whom Brack had had such an important conversation hastened in from his fires in the kitchens and looked over all the preparations to make sure that everything was going all right and smiled and bowed as the red priest himself sauntered slowly through, strewing some blood from a thing called an aspergillis over the floor as he walked. I surmise the blood was thoroughly accursed by some ritual that was pure flummery of course, but what he was saying in the ancient tongue called Demonlang would curl the whiskers of the great opponent, Yahveh himself.

Bonur himself waddled through the hall, and stopped to talk to the red masked priest—who was also *Nake*, his right hand, under the horned mask.

"Has all the flummery been well attended to, *Nake*, you faker?"

"Quite, quite, chosen of Satan, quite."

"It will come off all right, eh? I don't want to miss the sacrifices."

"I rather enjoy them myself, my lord, though it seems a great waste of good flesh. But as you say, we get the value out of the dupes for the trifling price of a few slave's lives. Odd, eh, how the old ways and customs persist. In spite of Time's dull sweep, custom persists. We could not hold the wild ones of the far caverns without this foolishness, and they would not bring us gold or slaves or the rare mech and the ancient jewels, did we not put on a good show for them."

"God knows what they will bring in next. Last week from a cavern under Mexico an ignorant, unwashed idiot of the maddest stripe brought in a solid gold robot as a gift to the Red One. For Satan himself—all that value—and without the slightest idea of asking anything in return but Satan's good wishes."

"CURIOUS things, some of those robots the old ones manufactured. One cannot imagine what their uses might have been."

"This one was a curious sample of their workmanship. Heavy—and the mech inside made it walk and talk as lightly and as beautifully as a young girl. It is a beautiful thing; that is, it was. I activated the mechanism inside and it walked up to me, peered into my eyes in the most human way, and began to talk in the ancient tongue; you know, you have heard some of the mech talk as if they were imbued with actual life. I know little of the tongue, but I know enough to know that this robot was a kind of prophet, and that it foretold some doom, some kind of curse. It worried me for a time. . . . And as the robot went on and on, the ominous tone of the voice, the terrible, fear-creating gestures of the thing, the seemingly actual life in the robot struck me with fear and with an anger as at a human being! I ordered the thing cast into the melting pots and made into bullion. Later I was sorry, but you know how fearful some of that mech can be when it runs amuck. Well, I think we are better off without that robot around. Maybe it was just a machine, but sometimes one believes in magic when one sees the wonders those ancients created."

Nake mused aloud, "She spoke in the ancient tongue, and seemed to prophesy doom, eh? That worries me, Bonur."

"Ah, it's silly. She was probably created to act a part in a play or something; one can't believe a mental thing that has lain around for untold centuries in the dark of a deserted cave could think, could prophesy—it's a ridiculous idea. . . . Just the same, Nake, keep your eyes open."

"It might be well to keep our eyes open without any robot gloom to make us, Master."

"You're right, Nake. Plenty of people would be happy to see us dead."

"Those ancients were wondrous wise, Bonur."

"Don't try to worry me, Nake! And don't get the idea you should inherit my power if something happened. I keep my ears open, Nake."

"Have your joke, Master. But just the same, be careful, we would all be lost without you; all the strings of our lives are in your hands. If you should stumble, we would all fall."

"And don't forget that, Nake!"

Bonur walked off chuckling, but Nake did not take the strange account so lightly, for Nake knew a thing or two, himself. Such unbelievable things had sometimes been accomplished by the antique work that one could believe anything of it. Nake had once seen a machine that turned out (from a mass of vegetable and animal matter thrown into the hopper) a living thing that was manlike. An intelligent, human-looking product had arisen living from the machine.

Nake had known enough of the ancients' mental slant to have the thing killed, for what a thinking product of their handiwork would do to evil was not unknown to Nake. Too, there was an old tale that the ancients had had the power of foretelling the future. Well, Nake decided, he would hope they did *not* do it with a machine that was built like a golden girl.

AN HOUR later the feast was in full swing, the woman who served as the Altar of the Red One, was well nigh worn out with the countless dishes that had rested on her for the look and nod of the robot who was supposed to be the great Satan himself animating the metal statue.

Flames roared from a full hundred cooking fires about the walls, and over each revolved a spit, and on the spits were pieces of flesh. The cruel customs of the age-old worship of the deification of evil required the eating of human flesh, and the nature of the caverns intermittent and often nonexistent food supplies had done much to perpetuate the custom.

The woman who has served as the altar before the terrible figure of the Devil rises and begins "The Dance of the Demoness." That dance of a soul becoming the Devil's ecstatic property—that dance, for sheer wanton lust of the flesh, for sheer all-out casting off of all spiritual and moral restraint (such as lingers in all surface men's equivalent performances in some fashion) can give the mind a view into the true fiery lure of Hell. The dance of the blood-dabbled priestess of the Sabbath is the beginning of an orgy such as few men of normal mind ever see—and stay sane.

Remember that neither the dancer nor the devotees of the cult of blood and torture and death are in any way the products of an environment akin to our own.

Both the dancer and the glittering-eyed maniacs who watch her portray the casting aside of all human feeling and the donning of the full character of the "demoness" are people raised in an ancient tradition of the worship of evil as a way of life, a belief and worship more intensely indulged mentally than any Christian or other surface worship. Their minds—since little children under

the absolute control of ray-workers themselves more debauched than one can imagine—have been shaped in a mold of inhuman thought forms by the powerful control beams of the telaug till reactions inconceivable to us have replaced several natural reaction within their minds. Only when seen on the thought screens of the ancient telemach can it be believed.

There is much of this dance and of the orgy that follows that cannot be described here for obvious reasons—such as the prostration of the priestess before, and union with the metal, horrible, human inhumanity of the form of the Great Demon Lord.

I believe that evil should be brought out into the light and looked at—but there are those who, perhaps for reasons of fear, or reasons you may imagine for for yourself, would object. One often thinks they must be in league with the devil themselves to throw such a shadow of obstruction before attempts to portray the true picture of evil life as it actually is.

However, picture for yourself the priestess-dancer presenting the sacrificial babe, squawling and kicking, to the great ugly robot that is supposed to be the vehicle in which the Devil returns to life for an evening. Picture the madness of the foul murder that follows.

Picture the audience, sprawling in a great crowd, their eyes drinking in the utterly savage scene. Remember that this scene has taken place exactly the same since before we had a Santa Claus. Before the Egyptians had a Pharaoh, this same devil worship in the caves was old.

Remember they are the children of a race which has for ages had beneficial rays of great curative powers in their ignorant hands, and never found a way of getting one bit of the medically beneficial ray-generator mech to surface



men; to men who might study, copy and manufacture it; develop from the science of the past a science that would set man back upon the path to racial greatness—but, instead, this hidden race has be-deviled and obstructed men always out of fear of what men might do to them for their deeds if ever they got power. They think of themselves as “demons” and of us as “men”!

Always they have feared to even tell their surface brothers of the wonders of the ancient science. A foolish, dog-in-the-manger attitude has kept the ancient wisdom secret and excluded from wide study all these endless, wasted centuries.

Nor shall I describe the “beauty” of this dancing “demoness.” It may be just as well you cannot see her as she is (as I might describe her were the censors willing) but I do not believe that.

**R**EMEMBER always that such as she and many like her still *live*, and still have power over men like yourself—the power of life and death. They *really* exist, and practice their ancient evil seduction in many, many places under our earth. Picture yourself falling into her hands—would she have some use for you? Not at all—only as a thing from which pain could be wrung.

Then realize that still today stupid men of the surface serve such beings in ways you may guess at—and serve them to our detriment.

Picture the burning wretches over the coals whipped even as their flesh crisps in the searing heat. Realize that they are only the preliminary scenes that lead up to the main events. Picture the beautiful maidens (sometimes stolen from the surface) who wrestle with ravening tigers and other beasts and die bloodily just as they did in an-

cient Rome, before a more bloodthirsty, more stupid and savage group of madmen and madder women than ever graced Rome’s perfumed arenas.

Then realize that these same spectators are people who whisper and lie nightly to our own state officers, our elected rulers, and get them into a state of mind where they *really believe* that a secret science—from the “stars” of “space,” mind you—has come to earth and is working with people to make something out of them. Or that they are selected “Fausts” and must do evil or die!

Realize that earth has more horrible perils still to struggle against than ever the Germans were and we will win. For we are not few nor weak, and we, the white magic, have all that power and ancient heritage, too. And it shall be ours for real study on the surface if ever the evil of the caves can be defeated and the entrances freed of such as the Bonur pictured here.

Some of these dying slave girls were not so long ago decoratively wobbling across Fifth Avenue on their high heels. Now, they are on police blotters as “Missing, left note saying—Going to end it all, disappointed in love.” Any obvious fabrication will do to evade the necessity of admitting publicly that the “Marvs”<sup>7</sup> got another one. Men who are men enough to admit there is an underworld is what we need. They have heard of it endlessly, it is well known among many classes of society and quite openly talked about. But for our learned professors and wise medical men and ever-right historians to admit that something they hadn’t been taught in school could yet be true is too much to expect.

Police know it, I am sure, but can’t say it, can’t locate the trouble when

<sup>7</sup> “Marvs” is slum slang for the well-known “voices.”—AUTHOR.

they know it exists, and have given up all mention of it as a hopeless job. Well it isn't hopeless, but it was to medieval men. They had no science to understand the wonder world. We must dare to face what we know to be true.

Picture then that these dying girls are still but preliminary scenes to the "real stuff" of the evening. What do you think the real treat of the evening will be? I can't tell you—not the most terrible, but I will try to describe one of the lesser of these sadistic treats if I can get away with it.

Picture a square formed of oaken four-by-fours, held upright and of a size to enclose a human figure at the shoulders. A strong young man is lashed firmly to the oaken cross pieces—spread-eagled—with many stout ropes binding him. He is lashed firmly, arms and legs tightly held within the frame. Now picture a super-stimulator ray played upon his muscles of such strength that he leaps and leaps again in gradually increasing strength against the stout frame till the oak *splinters*, his arms and legs break, the blood spouts from arteries torn asunder by spasms of a fearful and mighty force which no human body can live through.

Picture the hereditarily mad group of people who have enjoyed just such scenes over and over back and back into time—before the very stones of the pyramids were quarried from their beds. That is the savage life which still persists in all its ancient evil in some parts of the caverns under our feet.

Picture that this scene of death is not yet the climax of the feast of the Satanists. What then do you think the climax will be?

Such are the devil ray of the caverns, though their way of life has made them few, still they are the mightiest threat to civilization that lives "on" or

"in" this planet. They control vast areas of our surface governments, and surface men can not touch them with any weapon they know—indeed when they know of them, fear even to speak of them. Police and others who should will not admit of their existence. If they want to be secret no lowly police chief or newspaper editor cares to say them nay.

Truth is, there is no more stupid or evil people on earth than the evil ray people, and only the good sane groups of ray defending us with the mighty mechanisms of the chasms below us save us from a life of degradation unimaginable except to those who have seen what sadist ray-men can do to make life unnecessary to the normal human in their power. Thank God there are some good ray people.

## CHAPTER VII

### Feast of Poison!

THE black smoke rises from torches set about the great hall, in slow evil twists, and the yellow light is shed fitfully over feasters, who are mostly rather small men, often deformed and horrible to the eye, for the strange heredity of the caverns has brought fearful changes to the forms of many—great lumpish skins, twisted limbs, and beastlike faces. They do not often let surface men see these deformities, even when they are people of good will. But this "bunch," clad in rags and dirt, diseased, with madness glaring from their eyes, are the worst of the people of the abyss—the Satanists.

They are the lowest things that earth has bred in the shape of man. They do not have the sense to keep clean, or to think as men do in any way. Their value lies in a cleverness and quickness, a knowledge of the uses of the ancient

mech they have grown up with, and a willingness to use the same in any vile way the master bids. This cleverness and quickness of the hands and eyes is something they acquire very young or die. For the mad ones of the wild stretches of the caves—and most of them are wild, unexplored—survival depends upon constant watchfulness and skill with a ray beam similar in some ways to the art of fencing with a rapier. No training can make up for the skill acquired by the mad ones in their constant fighting with the mech-ray from their childhood on.

To a surface man, the fat, waddling figure of Bonur, the Boss of Ontal, just one of the great cities of the underworld, would have looked comic. But he was fearful and deadly of appearance to those who knew him.

Bonur was heavy with fat, and his hips were much wider than his shoulders. About his waist was a very wide jeweled belt, and in the belt was thrust a multitude of peculiar weapons. As he walked, the weapons—built for men of a size three times Bonur's short six feet—swung and banged about his knees.<sup>8</sup> His robe, of a scintillating, florid fabric from the east, embroidered over with great passion flowers; his fat pouter chest hung with a glitter of ornaments; his broad red face, dark with the slovenly stubble of his beard; his drooping jewels hanging over his jeweled collar: his whole appearance was ludicrous comic opera to a surface man's eye. But it was not comic opera to the men of the underworld. They had to face this man as their ruler, the lord of life and death whose whim was law. All the ignorant bestiality of his nature was their problem, to placate, to please, to get along with somehow.

Bonur's studies and experiments were

<sup>8</sup> The elder race seems to have averaged about twenty feet, as near as can be judged.—AUTHOR.

his one bright spot, to our eyes, but the truth was they led most often to a more painful, more darkly evil method of hurting something human—of making something far less than human out of flesh. They could not even begin to think of plans to replace the horror that ruled them, for the telaug beams of his cronies and slaves and favorites, always about, would have instantly revealed any such thought. Treachery could not have been repressed by a surface man, for every evil was in him, and a normal man cannot help desiring some rights, some dignity, some virtue to hold to with pride—something to cling to as an assurance that his life is not wholly a waste. But none of these were allowed under Bonur. To hold such thoughts was "treachery." Those who survived under Bonur assiduously cultivated a servility of mind, a thought-discipline of unimaginable severity of refusal of virtue, of unbelievable ferocity of lust for blood and death to anything that might threaten the supremacy of Bonur—and Satan.

And this mental attitude must be real, must always be worn like one's clothes, and must be followed as the rule of conduct upon all occasions. Those who failed to alter their soul to fit Bonur's nature—to fit it by scrupulous copying of that nature from observed activity of Lord Bonur—those people died slowly and in the eyes of all; a lesson to the rest.

**BY** CAREFUL suggestive work with the long range telaug by Brack and old Ben Uniatty, the mind of the cook had carefully been imbued with a complete fascination for the taste of the new condiment given him by the friendly stranger. The only precautions taken by Bonur against poisoning was a slave taster who must perforce take a bit of every kind of food and a sip of every

drink before Bonur placed it in his mouth. Other than that Bonur and Nake had worked out a system of food supply for the Stem palace which made sure that every bit of food used in the palace was straight from the unconscious, unsuspecting surface food factories—brought direct by truck. But in the case of these feasts, in which human flesh was used, these precautions were necessarily relaxed.

That Bonur did not conceive of a slow poison that took effect long after the poisoning I can only attribute to his ignorance. He was an experienced man, an educated man as such go in the caves, but of wide learning of the kind dispensed by surface men he had none. For that matter, you would find upon search that many of our most powerful and hated men take few precautions against poison. It just seems to be a thing little done.

Bonur's youth and young manhood had been spent here in the Stem-palace; first as a child of an officer about the palace, later as a soldier, then an officer whose plotting had led at last to the leadership of a group of ray-warriors who had seized power by killing all those who stood in their way. That Bonur had got the throne had been due to his own ruthless killing of his confederates when the chance offered. For their part they were ignorant men, in our eyes—though in the underworld there is little education of a formal kind and a man's worth depends solely on the amount of skill he has been able to acquire with the varied kinds of antique ray-mech.

So it was that Bonur was great because his opportunities had proved great, due to the fact that his father and his friends had been in charge of the great vaults full of peculiar and terribly powerful devices stored by generations of acquisitive rulers of the

Stem. Perhaps it was the greatest collection of powerful weapons and of antiques in the whole underworld. Bonur had supplied the know-how when the time for rebellion had come, and the vaults of the Stem had supplied the weapons. It had really been but a simple matter of disposing of a few trusted guards left in charge of the great vaults of the Stem's widespread, labyrinthine borings, the caves that made up the Stem-palace.

It is hard to understand how people with mechanisms to read minds either on the surface or in the caverns could be ignorant, but such is the case except in certain areas. They are either the hereditary rulers or children of wholly dependent slaves, or the free nomads of the deserted caverns. Originality, invention, courage of the mind, resourcefulness, ingenuity are qualities undeveloped among them because of the nature of their life, of the wholly different conditions of their world. It is best understood by considering India, which has perhaps had as much real opportunity to be a great modern nation as any; but has failed because of the repressive and smothering influence of its castes, its religions, its customs and its climate.

The cavern people are also a product of their environment, and that environment is a very different one from our own. That Brack or someone like him could slip a poison to his cook unobserved by the ever watching numerous telaug rays was unthought of by Bonur because it was considered impossible. It was in fact impossible to an ordinary man, but Brack and Tim were far from ordinary men. And Old Ben Uniatty was one of the wisest products of a life that has produced wizards since the pyramids. They were men who had made a lifetime study of ways of evading the objectionable forces in their



life, and were perhaps the only men on earth who could have successfully fooled and evaded a ray-watch long enough to give Bonur's cooks the peculiar condiments under circumstances which would arouse no later pursuits, having left no trail in the minds of the men involved. The cook would not remember getting the poison, the thought-concealer device worn by Brack had successfully concealed his true thought with a superficial blanket of false thought as the deed was done, and now the thought in the cook's mind was wholly one of giving the food a much more appetizing flavor, rather than a thought of killing a great number of people in a wholesale poisoning.

**I**N THE Palace of the Stem the orgy of the Satanists is drawing to a close. The great robot statue of the Devil has danced ponderously, and the priestess has postured redly, her body glistening with the blood of the sacrifices, her lewd incantation to the God is finished, all the delights of sin depicted with a wealth of gesture.

The gloomy, crowded cavern is filled with smoke, with wine scents, perfume scents, blood scents, with the smell of sweat and unwashed bodies, with the odor of food and the roasted meats—and if one were on the lookout—the scent of the bag of peculiar and deadly drug acquired by Tim Shanter in the bedroom of the dead dancer Lura, mingling though well hidden by the other odors.

The lilies, red and black, which had been used to decorate the place lie now trodden into the straw on the floor. Half of the guests lie under the benches, too drunk to move.

In their hidden, imperviously sheathed den, Brack and the old man watch the progress of the feast elatedly. Nearly every one of the feasters has

partaken of some of the poisoned meats. Bonur himself having come in for an hour to show his oneness with the pleasures of his things, to make sure that they are seated and comfortable and agreeable to his future plans. Red Nake was fed quite a bit of it by a charming slave girl, under Ben's suggestions, for Nake had not much appetite but could not resist the laughing girl.

As the last drunk was put to bed in the chambers adjoining the great feast hall, Tim Shanter piloted the old rollat containing Nita, Bill, Old Ben Uniatty and Brack farther and farther along the way leading to Bron, a small city some two hundred miles to the north of Ontal. They did not wish to be under the range of Bonur's ray beams as the poison began its long and painful course; a course of illness for which there was no cure, no known antidote—he might accidentally guess the source of his trouble before it killed him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Red Nake's Revenge

**T**HAT flight was a mistake. What ill-gotten goddess had put the thought in their minds? They were the only car on the roads that morning. This was not so unusual, but the empty-headed cook—whose mind's blankness had been their tool, now found his blundering way to becoming their inadvertent betrayer.

Nake was going over the kitchen stores totting up the cost of the feast. The cook, whose twenty-four hour memory had not had time to forget his suddenly acquired infatuation for the strange condiment given him by Brack, managed to find a moment to brag to Nake of the wonderful new flavoring for meats he had acquired. As he talked, Nake, listening contemptuously with

half an ear, suddenly froze as the possibility of the thing flashed through his mind. For all of their stores of food were from the surface city. Not one iota of it was supposed to come from other sources than their own trusted agents. This custom had for long been one of their strongest safeguards against such an occurrence as the cook was glowingly outlining to Nake's suddenly fearstruck ears.

"For the sake of the Devil, let me see some of this marvelous flavor, you fat imbecile!"

The cook, foolishly not knowing it meant the loss of his life whether he showed him or not, promptly found the shaker of strange powder and gave it to Nake. Nake took it and raced off to Bonur's, but on the way a strange thought struck him and he stopped. If he could find out what was in it on his own; if it was poison; if there was an antidote; if he kept his big mouth shut—why the whole Stem would fall uninvited into his lap. He could take the antidote, slip it unnoticed to his favorite men, and stand back to watch the others curl up in death. It might be a bit of luck.

NAKE stood over the old chemist, a slave long a captive, but once a surface scientist of some renown. The old hands, shaking but still clever, poured reagent after reagent upon the powder.

"Seems to be everything under the sun in this mix. I can't tell what the poison is—if it is a poison—but I'll bet my last weeks food slips it is, and a little known one. This will take time, Nake. I never saw anything like this stuff, and I've seen a lot."

"There are some poisons that are found in the ancient's hidden stores, they would be hard to analyze and of substances unknown and hard to under-

stand as to their effects. Is there any way you can tell me if this is a fatal dosage of poison in the amounts we got into us? There is not so much in the shaker and it was spread over quite a bit of meat."

The old chemist smiled at Nake and walked over to a goldfish bowl. He dropped a grain of the stuff in. For a few moments the fish swam as idly as ever about the bowl, but gradually their tails quivered faster and faster, they raced about the bowl for a long time, then turned belly-up, their bodies jerking with cramps. Finally they rose and lay on the surface but did not die, just lay there, gasping.

"It is a poison, Nake. It may act quite slowly on the human; the goldfish are very delicate and react to the slightest trace of a poison. What it is I do not know, but I will try to find out and tell you. I would suggest you find the men who gave it to you and learn from them the antidote if you can. It is a strange material."

As Nake left, the old chemist stood smiling absently after him. Once before he had been asked to analyze a very similar substance. A warm feeling rose within him and he suddenly cut a little caper with his feet as he realized that most of the devil-bunch at the feast must have got some of the stuff into them. He grinned steadily, breaking into low laughs as he returned to bed. There'd be little work he'd do finding an antidote. He might be old and slow, but not dumb.

NAKE hurried to his own quarters and woke two of his cronies. He set them to searching the city with the long telaug beams, searching every stray and curious thought for the slightest inkling of who might be responsible for the deed. Nake was rather explicit in telling them to keep their own mouths shut

and minds guarded till they had learned whether or not the thing could be turned to account, or would prove the death of them.

So it was that as they swung the great old penetrays of the telaugs over the city of silence and despair the only moving thing in sight was the rollat bearing Brack and Tim, Nita and Bill and Old Ben. Their thoughts, though hidden by the devices Brack had hastily clapped about their heads, were still confusing and suspicious, for Brack in his hurry had not prepared a synchronized set of related records and the unrelated records showed a confusing mess of peculiar thought to the inquiring rays. Nake sent a police car racing after them on the chance that they might know something. There was something odd about their being the only car leaving the city.

THE five disheartened friends stood before Nake in his private quarters in the Palace of the Stem. Looking up at the great frowning faces of the carved Elder race; at the infinitely intricate parquetry of stone set in the walls in those designs no human could ever imitate; down at the purple glass of the floor where fishes of glittering gold and gleaming red and night black swam frozenly in the glistening glass; looking anywhere but at the eyes of Nake who had been poisoned and wished mightily that he had been not poisoned.

He had swiftly found the thought-concealer record-mech they wore about their heads and removed them, put a beam from his own telaug upon each of their minds, was questioning them with a kindly smile on his face as though all this were but a joke, hoping to trap their startled minds into an admission of guilt—and succeeding. The telaug revealed the fact they had done the deed, but it also revealed that they

themselves knew not the antidote for the dread, deadly stuff they had stolen from dead Lura's home.

Nake grinned a grim, evil smile of defeat at them as he listened to the slow, unwilling flow of their thoughts through the multi-screen before him. That screen could have carried a hundred separate beams from a hundred minds, if Nake had been man enough to read them all. But five were about as much as even his quick inner eye could follow.

Nake motioned to his friends, standing behind him with their ancient pistols trained upon the five just in case the meek appearance of the five was not true. As Nake revealed the whole truth to their already alarmed minds, they snarled with rage, their fingers tightened on the huge triggers of the vastly oversize pistols. But Nake held up a hand to stay them, whispered again to them, and the fellow called Horr Bratt laughed such a laugh as a man reading his death sentence may laugh and hurried from the room.

"Just a little wine before I show you to your sleeping rooms." Nake's smile was as seductive as ever was Cleopatra's offering poisoned wine to a guest. Horr Bratt returned with a decanter of the blue grape, which he handed to Nake with a grimace of feigned pain, for he had already begun to imagine the pangs of what he knew must follow for him.

Nake took the decanter, lifted the stopper, and in plain sight of the five waiting silently he poured the full contents of the shaker the cook had given him into the mouth of the jug.

"It is an ancient potion that brings sweet dreams. Nake laughed at them again, and offered them glasses, which he filled.

"Drink, my friends, I have had enough wine for this night. And then

to bed, to wait, for this potion brings sweet dreams, indeed! Unless, of course, you feel like talking, in which case we are quite willing to sit up with you, I'm sure. What would you have?"

As he stood in front of Bill, offering him the well-filled goblet of death, Bill reached his hand to the glass, took it and with the same motion flung it into Nake's face and dived for his legs. As they floundered on the floor, Nake snarled a word to Horr Bratt and the other not to kill.

"If you kill them, we will never learn the antidote!"

**NAKE'S** was a body well fed for long, while Bill was just recovering from the effects of months of slow starvation, the starvation that gripped the whole city under Bonur's merciless taxes. As Brack and Tim stepped forward to help him, Horr Bratt triggered two bolts into the glass floor, and great smouldering stars of cracks appeared in the glass under their feet. They stepped back; there was no way to help. They all felt doomed since they had been caught when all had seemed so safe, so well-covered and complete. Nake brought his pistol butt down on Bill's head and the struggle was over. Nake got to his feet snarling.

"No more foolishness, give us the antidote or drink your potion and go to sleep with it, as we must! You have no other course of action. A fool would know that dying men are not to be trifled with."

Ben Uniaty spoke in his oddly young voice that fit so ill with his time-ravaged face.

"We do not really know the antidote, Red Nake. If we did, we might be so foolish as to buy our lives with it. But as it is, here's to our lives in Paradise; sure you'll never reach there, Red Nake, with the crimes you have on your

soul!"

Ben Uniaty, the best mind in all Ontal, drained the deadly potion and sat down, smiling oddly. Brack, hoping the old man had a card in the hole, but not seeing any other course open anyway, drained his own glass. Nita and Bill, looking at each other, drank theirs as though it were a love philter. Tim, the last, looked at his with the same dread that had plagued him in Lura's beauty-haunted home, finally managed to down it, grimacing. The five stood, facing Nake, as if to say "What now, we are all dead; so what?"

"Take 'em away! They may remember later what to do about the stuff. Have them searched; some clue to an antidote might be concealed on them. Put them in separate cells, right here in this same boring. Post a guard at each door. It may be that one might crack and wish to bargain with us. The guards are to have strict orders to call us instantly one of them wishes to speak, understand!"

It was a sad blackness in which the friends waited. There was no hope, for none of them knew anything about the poison except that Lura had used it effectively. They were all glad they did not know an antidote, for it would have been wrested from their minds by the telaug and they would have died anyway. If they had been free, they might have searched Lura's effects, found some trace of the antidote. But they knew that Nake had read in their minds where the stuff had come from and had sent a search party there himself. They knew that if the antidote were found, themselves would get none, and their death be more sure.

**THE** little slave-girl, Sarah, swung her watch-ray from Nake's apartments and upon the bed of Bonur where he snored loudly. A secret and some-



how beautiful smile played over her childishly sweet face as she resolved to say nothing. For in the time that Ben Uniatty had focused the teleport upon the chair where Bonur was removing her mind and replacing it with his own design, Ben had found time to subtly insert a beam of invisible "shorter" ray which had reduced the power of Bonur's erasing ray to near zero. So that Sarah's treatment had lasted but a few days. And now Sarah was again Sarah! Bending over the screened image of Bonur she watched him, vengefully grateful that the death stuff was in him, watching for the first signs of its effects upon him. Already she noted his limbs twitch with the first tremors of the approaching painful convulsions.

Outside, the great stone faces of the mighty God-wrought stone figures that lined the way of the Stem looked wisely at each other, saying "Wisdom is death, tonight. All is death and forgotten greatness, tonight."

Two weeks dragged by on slow, but fiery feet.

## CHAPTER IX

### Death, King of Ontall

**A**BOUT the palace of the Stem, and on the ways leading out of Ontal, were some thousands of things in human form, and of those thousands most were beginning to feel the pangs of a strange disease—a fire of pain began to spread through their limbs and convulse their muscles.

On the ways leading out of the city, the rollats, big as circus vans and some as ornate—though with the antique decoration that is never anything but exquisite—were parked beside the wide tubes in the alcoves that the ancients built at intervals. Inside, the devil-ray-men writhed their small and twisted

bodies in the first pangs of the long road to death they would all travel.

Inside the palace of the Stem, Bonur awoke, his whole body bathed in sweat in his dreams—which his slave watchers provided always in his sleep—had been strangely filled with foreboding. He had dreamed that the golden robot girl, the prophet machine the mad wight had brought from the south, had risen from the melting pot and came in to him, her terrible, musical voice telling him that soon, now, he would die!

Now, as he lay there in the luminous dark, Sarah's face bending over him in ray projection seemed the face of the terribly beautiful prophetess of doom—the golden girl herself. Slowly, the fearful fire of the pain from Lura's antique poison began to run through his veins, and Bonur felt such fear as he never had before. He leaped from the antique metal bed, as wide as three and as long as four, on which his spreads of silk and wool lay like a pallet on a giant's table, and rang a gong beside the bed. The obsequious slave who answered he sent to fetch Nake and Horr Bratt, for these two were in his closest counsel. Bonur divined that all was not well, and that he needed a doctor.

Nake came in all long-faced and gloomy, and answered Bonur's questions.

"I guess some enemy has got to us, Chief! I caught the cook right after the feast with some strange flavor in a box, and I have been having it analyzed and chasing hither and thither about it, not knowing whether it was nothing or a something to bother you about—and now the pains begin. I guess it wasn't all lies about Lura killing long after she gave them poison. It's over two weeks since the feast, and now it shows up. I guess there really are poisons that can kill long after the time you

take them."

But of the captured, under guard in his own apartments, he said nothing, for it was too late to be caught with them on his hands and not have told Bonur.

Bonur swore.

"Then there was poison at the feast? I'll burn the lives out of every rat in Ontal till I get the one that did it. I'll kill every child till the parents tell what this is . . . I'll . . .

Bonur's voice died, and he sat and stared, the pains running through him. For once he had come up against something he could not cure by killing someone.

"Nake, get every doctor in Ontal here. We'll get to the bottom of this if we have to burn the feet off every one of them. We'll get some pill roller that knows something about this."

"I'll get 'em, never fear. I have the boys out rounding up all the talent of the kind. We'll soon have every pill-roller in the city at work on finding out what it is we have got into us."

"If we had a sample. . ."

Nake produced the shaker and handed it over.

"Here is the stuff, chief, someone gave this to the cook with a wool about it being the best flavoring the world has ever seen, and the simpleton swallowed the yarn hook, line, and sinker. He is in bed now, having tasted the stuff long before it got into the food, but the poison is so slow of working that it is only beginning to get him down. By the looks of him he'll live a week or two yet. We may have three weeks, maybe one, it depends on how much of the stuff we got into us."

**T**IME passed on painful, burning feet in the Palace of the Stem, and on the ways leading out of Ontal. It was now three weeks since the poison

had been administered and all the victims were weakened by the effects. The "pill-rollers" worked night and day, night and main, in the great empty laboratory of the Stem; where once had been scientists with an education in some ways better than surface technologists, but now for years had been no one.

The symptoms, which had at first been slight recurrent pains, had increased daily in severity and pain and frequency. Now, three weeks after, from Bonur down to the lowliest lackey—and the innocent cook, causative tool—on down to the lowest mad denizen and devotee; all writhed and screamed day and night from the fires that consumed their lives so painfully, so slowly, so mysteriously.

In the cells in Nake's quarters, where the five conspirators waited Nake's torture—which occurred necessarily between his spasms of pain and increased in severity in proportion to his own agony—hope had left them. But a fierce pride in knowing they had freed Ontal of her worst oppressors upheld them.

The hardest thing for them to bear was the torture of Nita. For they had to witness what was done to her, hear her poor screams, watch her flesh torn with the whip—all the intricate engines of torment which the endless centuries of devil worship had passed down to these modern devotees of the red horned One. All were practiced before their eyes on poor Nita's shrieking beauty to wring from them the secret of the antidote. Yet all the time Nake knew it was hopeless, for in their minds could be read by his telaug experts the clear fact that they did not know of any antidote, if one existed. So that as his own pains increased steadily in severity, Nake gave up the hopeless job and left the poor wracked victims alone in their

cells, while he devoted his rapidly waning energies to flogging on the efforts of the technicals he had called in to find the antidote by chemical means.

He promised tremendous rewards if they succeeded, but as neither he nor Bonur had bothered much with paying anyone for anything since they had got power in Ontal, these promises only served to remind the workers that their work was more or less a gift.

The dying ray-watch, who read the minds of the workers frantically trying reaction after reaction upon the sample of stuff they had, knew the case was hopeless unless some lucky chance should reveal a clue to their eyes. For they had no idea what many of the ingredients of the material were, and Ben's efforts to disguise the odor of the stuff beneath a multitude of flavors and odors had complicated their job till the Devil himself could not have told what it was.

**A**T LAST came the hour when the sentry before Bill's cell door collapsed shrieking at his post. His legs, kicking in the last throes of death, were just beyond their reach. Escape was open to them, if they had the keys. They lay beyond Bill's stretching pain-wracked arm and out of reach of Nita's own futilely reaching, lash-scored hands.

But out of his own agony Bill drew a last brief strength of mind, and tearing his cell cot apart, made a hook of metal out of the spring. Tugging, fainting, reaching, at last he brought the key ring from the belt of the fallen guard to his own hands.

Bill, knowing he was doomed, and that there was no point in his actions, automatically unlocked the cell door, and staggering from weakness, unlocked the cell doors of the others. Old Ben Uniatty lay apparently lifeless in

the bed within the cell. Bill shook him savagely, not with hope, but because any action seemed to ease the terrible fire that consumed his veins, his life.

He picked up the old man, and, leading the others, who supported each other, led the way from the hated place. At least they might die at home, among loved surroundings.

As they fell and staggered down the great two-foot steps outside the palace of the Stem, to the round at the side of the way where were parked a mass of vehicles whose drivers would never again pilot them through the dark but weird and awfully beautiful ways of time-forgotten Ontal, old Ben Uniatty managed to murmur:

"To my laboratory, to the great metal room where my workshop lies, I may have remedy for the poison. Hurry, man, hurry!"

Bill surmised the old man was out of his mind—as indeed he appeared to be at the last threshold of consciousness—but decided to please his last wish anyway, though himself wanted to see his own loved chamber of the sculptured sea-plants and supremely beautiful females of the forgotten race in the stone niches where the water poured over them greenly forever; the room that his love for Nita had made sacred. Still Bill turned the wheels of the rollat toward Ben's workshop deep in the bowels of the city.

When they arrived, Bill had to carry the unconscious bodies of his friends into the place one by one, for none of them could more than murmur and weakly lift their arms to aid him. Within, himself collapsed across the body of Brack.

And the great enigmatic machines that Ben alone knew the slightest possible use for seemed to stare sadly at the five fallen there before them. And a spirit was in the room weeping, the

spirit that was the soul of Ontal, for here lay her best, her bravest—and if there was hope in the old man's mind, there was none here, for his hands were fast stiffening in death.

Time dragged her weary, solemn feet through the great metal room, and the reward of their effort for the great future life of man was to be denied them. And something that men know, but never see, wept silently as the seconds ticked off the last breaths of five who tried nobly for their brothers, and paid the cost in full.

Bill, after long moments, lifted his head and his glazing eyes fell on one of the great machines that crowded there in the safety of the impervious metal walls. And that machine was one he had known in his infancy. On his hands and knees he crawled, inch by slow inch, to the feet of the metal monster, and pulling himself upright at last, turned the great metal stud that gave it power. Within the enigma that such ancient things always are to all men, power hummed a song, and from the bowl that was its face a flood of strange energy poured strength into Bill. For Bill would have to be nearer dead than he was not to recognize a beneficial ray mech when he saw it. Such rays are the coveted and valued possession of all who live and survive in the caves, for life is not supported in the darkness without these rays to replace our sun's less detrimental and necessary rays.

As new strength flowed into him, Bill raised and looking at the grey head and knowing old Ben would be the first to finally succumb to the effects of the poison, dragged the old man under the vibrant light of the powerful ben-mech. Bill then crawled again to Nita's side, took her dress in his teeth, and began dragging her into the light. As her body lay at last within the vibrant, rosy

light of the ben-ray, his will exhausted its last reserve power, the floods of pain from the fire in his vitals washed over him. Darkness again wrapped him.

**W**ITHIN the great gloomy Palace of the Stem, death reigned. The guards lay stiffened at their posts; in the harems and slave quarters the soft bodies of the women lay sprawled here and there and here and there one twitched and moaned until the death rattle silenced the moans.

In Nake's rooms, under the strong beneficial rays of his private mech, lay Nake, alone now, groaning, writhing and cursing, but still very much alive thanks to the life-generating power of the dynamos of the ben-ray mech.

On the great God-throne, so ludicrously too large for this contorted, bloated body, within his throne room in the Stem-palace, sprawled Bonur Golz. His eyes stared at the shadows deepening around him. Up the great steps of the dais, stealthily, silently, crept Sarah, his slave-girl, a ray gun huge in her soft hands. Sarah was weak, near death, but on her livid face her so-long obscured will flamed in that spirit that drove Joan of Arc.

Up to Bonur's twitching, contorted, bloating body she crept silently as the shadow of death itself. Bonur looked up to see her face, distorted with the hate she bore him, and to hear her say: "Just to make sure, Bonur Golz, my love! Pah! Toad, die!"

The great dis-ray pistol held out in her two shaking hands spit a brilliant bolt of terrible energy through Bonur's fat belly, through the mighty stone of the great throne, through the far wall.

She slipped to the floor beside the terrible dignity of the God throne, and the scene of her last deed in life did honor even to that awesomely sculp-



tured chamber of ancient honor and striving. For Sarah strove in her hate, and died so, trying to do right. The gross horror crouched on the God throne was dead, and the sculptured faces looked down on Sarah as she died with their stony approval not incongruous. The spirit of the Elder race lives on in the human and as long as there are Sarahs there will be men worthy to carry on the striving toward the ancient greatness.

**B**ACK in old Ben Uniatty's workshop, the old man lifted his grey head weakly under the full power of the great ben-ray mech. He looked wearily at the sprawled, still bodies of his friends about him—and full consciousness came and looked out of his eyes, fast glazing as they were in death.

Then the will that had driven him so long to fight when all seemed hopeless; fight so hard that all Ontal mistook him for the moving spirit of that great organization, the "helpers," raised him to his knees, made him crawl in spite of death already stiffening his limbs toward the huge levers manipulating the teleport mech. His shaking, enfeebled hands pulled the great lever, and majestically the terrific enigma of the teleport rose gleaming from its hiding bath of mercury. It rose and stood like the God-head of all machine-heaven before him.

Into the focus chamber he crawled, turned the dial, and the terrible power whined as the complex multibeam filled the room. And Ben Uniatty was sent by the teleport mech for a distance of six feet—as had been his yearly custom for many years.

He lay exhausted for long minutes, for the soul tearing experience of the titanic forces controlled by the machine had taken the last part of his nearly vanished strength.

Then his slow crawl began again, and Brack lay at last within the focus chamber. Again the dials and the big switches clicked, and Brack too lay some feet further away. Now Ben began again his crawl and strength was slowly returning to him. Though his breath came in great gasps, at least, it came.

Ben Uniatty loved men, and he knew that if he could teleport each of his dying friends the exclusion set-up of the titanic force-fields of the mighty teleport mech would leave the toxic material of the poison that was killing them outside their bodies in the sending chamber.

Ben Uniatty won, and the five friends, refreshed, but weak—after a long night's sleep under the great old beneficial rays—got ready to return to the Stem-palace. Out into the ever-night of ancient Ontal, toward the palace, Tom Shanter swung the great rollat's wheels, and a grim smile was on his face as he said:

"This day Ontal acquires a new ruler, yourself, Ben Uniatty, the best man in all the underworld!"

Inside the Palace of the Stem, Nake the Red gave a last groan, and as he expired under the strong beneficial ray that had failed to stop the poison death, Nake saw a strange face peering at him. Nake's last sight on earth was the face of a despised thief of the city who spat in his face and went on with his looting.

**THE END**

\* \* \*

#### **LETTER TO READER:**

*After reading over this story, I find that my attempts to give the true flavor of the underworld has not resulted very happily, insofar as speech is concerned. They speak several dialects of English. I have heard an old ruler telling his dream maker in these words:*

*"Shew me the hand. Shew me the foot. Shew me the waist and the movement therein, shew me the lust in her mind." Such English, I assure you, is impossible of reproduction unless you have been raised with it. Again, they use a jargon of slang more peculiar to themselves than jitterbug talk to the jitterbug—a modern slang—but the terms of it are full of words of double and triple meaning I have no power to put into English. If I tried to write entirely as it is you might refuse the whole thing. So I hope you will bear with the crudities I find I have committed for the sake of the story's vital information I give those who already know enough of the hidden world to know I give them much.*

*Your friend,*

*Richard S. Shaver.*

\* \* \*

#### AFTERWORD

HERE I think I should give you the gist of a newspaper clipping I have before me (clipped from either the *Sun* or the *Herald American* of Chicago, of approximately September 27, 1945—I do not recall the exact date as I clipped it a week ago and do not have the original paper; but if you are interested in checking me, the item should be easily found). The clipping gives the following general information:

"A young lady in Chicago (whose name and address I shall not mention to save her still further embarrassment—Shaver) has complained to the U. S. District Court that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is guilty of what she terms "malfeasance of duty" in permitting her to be troubled by rays, electric shocks, voices and radio eyes.

"In filing her own suit, the young lady complained that she had informed the FBI about her troubles but they had done nothing about it. (They couldn't—Shaver) She attributed the rays, voices, eyes and shocks to "unAmerican interests paving the way for anarchistic rule in this country." (They are always going to "come to the surface"

and take over our government—they never do!—Shaver)

"Naming Newark, N. J., as the place where her troubles began, she said: "There was some sort of equipment held in the rear of another residence which could vibrate the building or the bed in which I attempted to sleep." (There is some of the antique mech on the surface, brought up.—Shaver)

"Later, she moved to Wheeling, W. Va. But the rays followed her there. The FBI, she said, compelled her to sit under and over some sort of heat, whether it was radium lamps or other heat she did not know.

"In Chicago she asked that the court compel the FBI to solve the mystery and uncover these secret rays that were bedeviling her."

There you have the gist of the clipping, which is only one of thousands of clippings in a like vein that appear yearly in American newspapers. Their source is quite obvious to one who knows.

Many, many people like this unfortunate woman are sent to the madhouse every year for maintaining such "ridiculous" assertions. It gets in the papers—and there is so much of it that I believe an outfit as big as the FBI must know a great deal about the causes of these phenomena. It is most probable that they have found themselves helpless against such things, but if so their attitude in allowing their silence on the subject to send sane people to the madhouse is hard to understand. Perhaps they have their reason—they fear the panic results of exposing their information to all surface men.

But for those of you who do not intend to go to court and courageously hold the whole cave menace up to the light of day and spur the FBI in this particular endeavor to publicize one of the most evil farces in modern life—I have written the following story. It will explain just what is behind such news items.

For instance such a news item as the following—started me on this story because I felt guilty as hell for the death of seventeen service men, because I know more or less the real cause of the wreck and fail convincingly to acquaint the general public with the facts that would enable them to take some measures for their safety.

Remember the night of August 10? I was sitting by the radio, deep in the work

of another stf. writer—when the radio gave the news with which I began this manuscript; the item concerning the wreck of the Great Northern Empire Builder in Michigan, North Dakota.

It was this radio announcement that made me get up and go at my typewriter, resolved to lift the veil that hides the idiot evil that causes such wrecks once and for all. This story is the result. It is basically true, all the parts are true existent things. But the assembly as a whole is fiction. The "Stem" exists, but I am not sure whether it is under New York or a certain other great city. There are only three or four such great entrances; the rest are closed.

**Y**OU have read descriptions of the ancient slave marts? You have seen them in the movies, certainly. But did you know that the ancient slave market is an institution that has not died? That it lives on and flourishes in secret; as so many other ancient evils live on and flourish in secret and also in the concealment and protection of the caves; protected not only by the natural barriers of the miles of dense granite and basalt above, but also by the unmatched weapons of the Pagan God race themselves?

Depending wholly on these protective "shells," the animal "man" seems to have evolved very differently—or not at all. He must be seen to be understood. Inheriting absolute power as well as numbers of sycophants from their fathers, the rich and powerful—like the Rajahs of Indian history—are often weak, bloodthirsty, dissipated, wholly characterless (though I have seen the reverse), wholly a burden to their people. And this is a particularly terrible problem when their weapons are so invincible. Even to the sane, well-intended of the caverns who know the immensely technical field of antique ray mech operation intimately, it is also an insuperable problem, for weapons to defeat the antique stationary ray installations just aren't portable because of weight.

Tortures are a large part of the life of these evil ray of the caverns, and I will list a few of the more common things you must face to have a piece of the antique mech to study.

"Flaying alive."—Burning over a fire while being simultaneously whipped with a heavy metal-thonged whip.

"The steam chair"—a particularly delightful death much feared by the persecuted peoples of the underworld. It is a chair built of metal tubes into which live steam is admitted after the victim has been thoroughly lashed in place.

A favorite method of torture much used because the victim can survive to be sold as a slave, if care is used, is "freezing." By means of specially constructed devices shaped for the purpose built of refrigerating units, the victim is frozen solid over and over. The freezing is not particularly painful, but the "thawing out" is excruciating agony. After a few such treatments one is either dead or ready for any vileness asked of one—or such is the theory behind much of the torture; though to my knowledge few survive these entertaining ordeals.

To top the unpleasant aspects of the life of the caverns, many of the slaves are eunuchs, likewise many of the female slaves are brutally sterilized.

Some are given "stim-death" just for the fun of watching the nerve impulse augmented electrically until it is the power of a well-nigh killing electric shock. The victim kills himself by too violent contortions of the body. The back breaks or the arms break in the thongs, or the legs break in the anklets, and the victim bleeds to death.

Another favorite is the sclerosing solution in the veins. Plain Lysol is often used.

**W**HEN the owners pass in to the slave market with their slaves, the guard at the entry gate cries:

"State your stock."

The owner then enumerates the number and sex and age of his slaves. Inside, one hears such snatches of conversation as this: "He just practically gave away two kids." (Two children sold cheaply).

"Now she's on sale." *She* is a beautiful and cultured young American girl from the surface. She brings a good price from an old "crackpot."

Or: "And the market price in children is rising since the use of young blood transfusions for rejuvenation is in style." . . . "One's own child is apt to become a blood-cow for some old jerk to get young. And I'm supposed to be loyal! The least bad luck, a bum steer, a wrong gamble, and my own kids go to the block to become blood-cows for these dirty medical ray groups to sell to some rich old geezer!" . . . "Speak-

of torture, I saw a new one on my last trip into the territory of that whirligig witch, Nonur. She had an acid grease prepared and smeared all over the flesh of a young fellow. What a prolonged torment! The grease slows and prolongs the acid action; the flesh rots away." . . . "Yeh, it gets worse and worse. The green (money) is never enough. The price on young blood rises. One's sweat is never rewarded, while the fools and cheats, the double-crossing sneaks prosper. When you find a wise man, you find a man who lives in torment from the mad ray. A dream is never good, but is always perverted by some tampering dero into a nightmare. Love is turned phony in your arms by the stim ray. The only laughter you hear is a stupid, evil cachination, never anymore a real laugh of joy. Whatever a guy wants or could enjoy, it's 'all.' If you ask for credit it's as good as asking for jail."

This is a short picture of the cave life to show you Shaver's answer to the readers' rather frequent query: "Why doesn't Shaver lead a party into the caves?" *I'm* willing, but which entrance opens into a safe place where such a state of affairs is not waiting to engulf us?

Slavery of our best and most beautiful seems to be the actual case under some areas of our country. I have laid my picture of the actual, terrible life of the people of the caverns under New York, not because such is the case there (though to my knowledge it is *not* good there), but because the name will make you realize that all is not as it appears with American life. Much of this is concealed by corruption and intimidation of the personnel of our census and missing persons bureau. If you don't believe me, try and prove differently. You will probably find missing persons personnel "out to lunch." The "ray" receives large sums from various surface groups seems very true, for their lavish expenditures could only be so explained, or by the possession of many gold mines in the deeper caves. Many people do disappear into the complete slavery in the caves is obviously true if you know anything at all about the cavern life. The police obviously fear to admit where they go or even that they do go; that there are continual and unexplained disappearances every day (or in truth do not know either!). These are hidden in never-referred-to files of records is

obviously true.

**T**HE well stocked harems and slave pens of some of the big-shots underneath are obviously the big reason why the caverns are still the same ancient, secret, and powerful influence in our lives they have always been.

Naturally I can't take people into a place where they would become beaten slaves—and the first taste of slavery they would get would be the lash, for they would object to becoming slaves. Truth is, it is possible to get into and out of the caves without this sad fate; but it takes money in equipment and attendant publicity to cause the underworld to leave it alone for fear of exposing their hand.

Down there, the leases and contracts are written in "vanishing" ink; and when you are broke, you are sold as a slave to cover your debts.

You see, they are a slave state, and an absolute and terribly tyranny bordering our free surface states. When you enter you become a slave, your property confiscated by the most powerful native you encounter.

The rulers are sometimes descendants of a long line of rulers. They are people who have always lived thus and see no reason for change. Tyranny is their way of life.

When a slave becomes useless, it is as at Oswiecim, and the other German murder camps. He is disposed of as cheaply as possible. In the caves he is thrown in "the hole"; down and down his body goes, still screaming from his last torment. No man know where such holes go into the depths.

To really describe the life of the caverns is beyond words. We do not have the concepts, nor the experience with evil life to understand what is true when we read it. But I can try!

They fear and obstruct all scientists on the surface with the ancient penetrative rays that reach up and watch us through the miles of rock that protects them from our knowledge—and from our vengeance when, like Shaver, men know what they do. Such men as Pierre Curie almost always die strangely; and must always so die as long as the caverns roam with the mad nomads, or the cities of the surface are underlaid with the sinks of sin which do exist there. He must die as if it was an accident and he does. Like Pierre he walks into a loaded



truck obliviously, and is crushed. Or like Seabrook—who knew more than he dared tell—take sleeping tablets not because they want to, but because they are made to by rays controlling their bodies.

The people who do this did not build these rays, but they have learned how to use them and have kept the use secret in the endless centuries that have passed since the caves became tabu to surface men (except as slaves, and in some places—as food).

The evil groups of the underworld—which is in some places the only areas of earth where stupid, evil and backward men hold power since Hitler's death and Japan's surrender—fear all scientific progress up here. Hence their dog-in-the-manger attitude toward surface technicians acquiring even one piece of the indestructible antique mech. In the hands of quite a few surface men—hex-doctors of Pennsylvania; witch-doctors of Africa; seers and spiritulists; fortune tellers; criminals—are samples of the antique mech and they are used but are never turned over to surface technicians to study because of the ancient tradition of secrecy. The influential ones of the underworld are often backward mentally, culturally, technically, and spend their lives' powerful efforts trying to hold back, to make the surface world "wait" till they catch up with us mentally and technically. But they do not in truth progress down there, and so this is an endless struggle.

**T**HIS story Masked World is a courageous attempt to picture this world under our feet for you as nearly as may be done with words and ideas which are not adapted to portraying concepts you are not used to as "true" concepts. The speech they use is hard to reproduce, for they use so much telaug meaning, double meaning, that their English would not be understood by you unless you heard it mentally. Orally it does not reproduce.

It is not a "fine" story, and it might be frowned upon by ignorant moralists of the type who teach our young that all is sweetness and light in the world except for minor details which are being "tended to" by our FBI and kindred agencies. It doesn't do what I want, portray the full truth of the life of the underworld. But as an attempt in that direction you will find it valuable. It does give you some idea of what goes

on under your feet in the ever-night of the caverns where the forgotten Gods built their mighty cities before earth ever had a sun—deep in the rock where even the super-cold of space could not reach. We cannot reach or harm these people below us, but they do a good job of ruining their own life, if that is what you think should happen to those who deny surface people the products of an elder culture that would give us a future beyond the power of words to describe. Most of the parts of this story are actual true occurrences, but the assembly as a whole is, of course, fiction. And for those who can't stand the idea that such things *can* be true—it is a clever concoction of lies.

Since the story is designed to give you a complete picture of life in the masked world under our feet, it is not complete without the inclusion of a few of the incidents that make up the life of the mad, sadistic nomads who forever infest the wonderland that their dog-in-the-manger attitude denies to our eyes—and of the science which would make surface medicine a wonder of perfection in its fight against disease. These madmen below us deny our right to that health that the secrets of the old mech would give us. They are things which evil men use for their purpose, too stupid to want proper recompense or ask for it; things which the sane avoid like the plague down there, or kill on sight if they are able, if their ray reaches them first.

And these same things of the "netherworld" (familiar phrase to a student, eh?) have been used by surface people in the past (called "witches" and worse) for their own purposes. Since in those days not many of them had a spoken language, and in truth there were probably too few of them survived the darkness—for to survive the darkness one must have certain kinds of rays containing ultra-violet always upon one's body—they could only be communicated with by signs. This was an art that some families learned from their parents and kept secret, for to talk of it was to die as a witch. When they hated someone, or wanted someone removed for some purpose, all they had to do was to go to a secret place, make a doll resembling the person hated, and stick pins in the doll. The watching ray from below noted what was wanted from the appearance of the doll—and promptly stuck the real person with

very real and deadly rays from the ancient weapons that abounded around him. So, we have the legend of the doll of the witches (witch-craft) in full explained! It was a result of a very real and deadly code in use between the underworld and the surface.

What did the surface witch give for such a service? She gave her body over the stimulaug at any time desired—and on Walpurgis night gave it in full, in an even more actual form. Such was the sale of the soul to the devil; and in many cases I doubt very much that it was evil at all. But in many cases it *was* evil, and no mistake about it. In my own case it was not evil. But I know well how much evil there is still there, and what it was in medieval and ancient times one can well imagine. I have nearly lost my life to such evil several times, and I still worry. But the thing known as “white magic” in the old days, and as the “helpers” today, always intervened in time. One’s effort has a value still in the underworld, it seems.

**T**HERE are an infinitude of legends and detailed accounts of this communication between the magical underworld and the humdrum surface world. But those “not in the know” have always insisted that all such tales were lies; and usually have been ably assisted in this shutting of themselves off from a very profitable communion by those who did know all about it.

I can imagine the first shouted “bosh” when the yokel started to tell of the opening he had found leading down to “fairyland” belonged to a gentleman who is still with us, the mountebank and charlatan who uses the underworld to his nefarious ends.

It was the gentleman who told fortunes at the fair, or the gambler who used the underworld wights clever ray work to tell what cards his friend held across the board—and who got this very profitable and frequently very able work for the mere running of a few errands to places where their peculiar appearance barred the underworld from entrance without recognition or apprehension as minions of the Devil. He didn’t want his life’s sweetest bounty ruined by some yokel’s foolish revelation.

There are such individuals shouting “bosh” at *Amazing Stories* today, and they know more about it than we do—and get much more out of it! There are others who think the underworld is wholly their friend

—and those are the first to shout “bosh” at such as me. But there is too much evil rising out the old place, and it is time we took a hand in Hell’s hotter brews of evil. They cost too much in blood and tears, those mad and evil ones. All the kindhearted “white magic” in the world does not make up for it. They need a large hand, a helping hand, those good ones below. In one state, one day, lately, ten sane men were committed to the madhouse as incurably mad. Their minds had been deluded by the mischievous cruelty of the more evil subterranees into a state that no psychiatrist could see as anything but mad. Truth was, they had been treated to a few depressions of the buttons on an emotion organ, a few projections of real seeming phantasms from the telesolidograph mech, and had gone screaming out of their minds. They would be all right in a few days, but once in an insane asylum they would not be released for months to come. Truth is, you can’t tell many medics a story like this as true without their calling the wagon. “It just couldn’t be!” But you see, it is true, so it must be told.

Seabrook, a writer and investigator of the reason behind witchcraft and other weird phenomena of life, died at his farm in Rhinebeck on September 20, 1945. The doctor found him dead from an overdose of sleeping pills. But Seabrook had been deviled by rays for years. The sleeping pills were taken by him under ray control, for the old ray mech is an ideal tool that can take over a man’s body in such a way that all his acts are dictated by thought superimposed upon his brain in such strength that his own thought has no power over his actions. Such was Seabrook’s death. The truth is Seabrook knew the truth, but had been unable to publicly say so for fear of the madhouse. Many men are in that position.

**T**HE Satanists’ banquet was men like Bonur’s tool, back into the beginnings of life on earth; their means of getting the evil ones of the cavern into an illusion of loyalty, of receiving compensation for their efforts. They are not gifted with brains, being in truth an idiotic form of life which the peculiar conditions of the cave life had fostered in some areas for ages. The life support given by the magnificent machinery of maintaining life under all conditions left by the ancients had succeeded only in perpetuating

a kind of life that could exist only in these ultra-favorable conditions. They were wholly evil, and the errors of their ways never were corrected by nature, for the ancient beneficial rays and weapons allowed them to survive when better men perished. The truth is, the machinery had removed all need for effort from their lives and the result had been a degeneration of a most repellent kind—and as the truth is that evil is a reverse form of logic, they were supremely stupid for they had never found a real need for thought; it had all been done for them by the Gods who left the caverns to them.

The custom of using these evil degenerates as a cheap kind of assassin had become an institution of cavern life. They were paid little or nothing, but their evil natures had to be pandered to and coddled in certain ways, as they were irritable and unstable unless so treated. The annual feast of the Satanists had thus grown into an age-old part of their life, and was one way of keeping them in hand. Each year it was almost an exact repetition of the year before. The minds of the dero, if they can be said to have minds, were not such as to require much change in the fare. The dances of the red-masked figures were an exact and changeless repetition of some ritual so old its origin was as lost in time as the origin of the Elder race itself.

During the great Feasts of the Demons, one of the songs the devils hear contains these words in a tune familiar to you as a hymn—but known for centuries in the caverns as a song of the Demon's triumph over aspiring surface man:

*"Twill be my Demon's glory . . .  
Jesus on the cross . . .*

The words are distorted version of one of our much used hymns, and tells the story of the demon who connived and controlled the Romans and the Jews until Jesus was finally dying on the cross. I have often wondered since I first heard the Demon's hymn whether our hymn was first written or was a present, a mocking gift, from the underworld so that we might sing our dupe's hymn to a deed they hold as one of their mightier stunts, an incident in their long reign of terror over all earth, a reign they have upheld by frustrating all man's attempts toward union in good sensible effort toward a sane goal of humane power on earth.

THE eating of the flesh of a baby was considered an essential part of the ceremony. The custom had been curtailed by time till but one babe was usually slaughtered before the red idol, cut into small pieces and partaken of each as a symbol of the individual's emancipation from all human emotions, and of his complete prostration before the spirit of evil.

The Demon is not a figment of man's imagination; they have been a strong organization always, and today are perhaps as strong or more so than ever and as big a force in life. They have their hymns, and many of them are the very hymns we sing in our christian churches—but they are older and the words are often the horrible original from which our own hymns were given us in mockery. I have heard these hymns sung to the "god" of evil, and the antiquity of man's prostration and helplessness before these evil latter Gods who have duped and bedeviled man and held him back from his destiny by the evil teaching that they themselves were not men but demons—is the saddest history I have ever encountered.

The dero have been man's curse and are the reason man is mortal and worthless today. One cannot tell in words the terrible stretch of evil antiquity that can ring in the words of a demon's song. If I could but remember the words for you; it is a glimpse into the horror that is a race's madness through time, the demon race—the race that became devils because the machines they worshipped became sun-polarized.

I think that this occurred in this way: The cavern dwellers have a way of warming and cheering their gloomy homes by turning a conductive ray up through the rock and by it bringing the sun's rays themselves into the cavern over the penetrative conductive ray. Then when the sun set, they were as apt as not to use the same mech for making dreams, for the versatile of mech is often many such devices in one. I have seen them do this: use a dream machine—which is really the old record reader—the library of thought record's necessary adjunct without which the old thought records could not be read. But the dream-mech, as the cavern people call them, had also a penetrative ray by which the record pictures could be thrown to great distances. The same machine, because of the nature of this ray designed to convey the most subtle and vari-

ant of thought waves in their entirety, also served as the best ray to bring the light of the sun into the caves. So it was that the dream-mech became sun-polarized.

In time they came to use the same mech for the making of dreams—which is a way of using the record reader to produce dreams—for in the record-mech is a way of introducing one's *own* thought to the person receiving the record so that one's wildest fancies can be introduced into the fabric of the story of an ancient recording of the thought of an ancient elder man. This may be difficult to follow, but the wise ones of the modern dwellers below have told me that this is the way the demon originated on earth. His mind became sun-polarized from the radioactive machine which had become so by exposure to long periods to the direct rays and inductive power of the sun itself. So it was that the mad sun-inductive mind of the demon was inevitable—for they had to have sunlight—and the means by which they got sunlight became the means of evil's domination of their lives.

So it was that the demon became an hereditary character dominating the cavern life; and today the same danger threatens and destroys and may wipe out surface life again as it has done before, over and over. History is not all in history books, you see.

**TO GET** back to the feast of the devils

repeating its age-old pattern of evil under hands like Bonur's grasping hand—the red masks, the black robes, the details you are familiar with from your christian descriptions of Hell—were here seen for what they were in truth, an “actual” thing of living, degenerate people of a race that had lost its birthright of reason from an affliction peculiar to their uses of the ancient machines for centuries after they had become unfit for use—their ignorance of the science behind the wonder-mech giving them no inkling of the fate the sun-polarized mech would doom them to—the fate of degenerating into inhuman, unthinking, and complete demoniac creatures.

In the past these creatures have emerged from the caverns and swept all life from the vast areas of earth's surface; and their wide dispersion under earth has succeeded in their mad single-minded secretive destruction of records of their past in keeping all knowledge of the origin and nature of evil from us of the surface. This condition

is what I have set myself to remedy—and this story is my vehicle to this purpose. So I hope you will bear with me if I have diverged from the story form, for the task is a great one, and I fight not only ignorance but a complete inheritance of obstructing thought which is our own heritage of stupidity from the past influence of the demon's fingers forever in our minds in the ages past.

For instance if I try to tell you the awful depths of the degradation of human-like things who have degenerated so many centuries in dark destructive secrecy under our feet, the ignorant man who is in position to stop such revelations imagines I am transgressing the law of morality, even though my purpose is wholly to depict evil as it really is so you may know it. Yet the dark heritage of ours steps in shouting “lewd”, “must be censored” etc. So if I omit the details of this debauch as I know it to be—you must allow for these obstacles and supply the revolting details from your own imagination or from the records themselves—which can be found in many places—in medieval records of Satanists gatherings and ceremonies kept by churches from the consumption of time—and by looking for them you can find these details, ever the same, repeated back into history as far as writing was known. Satan was, and is—and will be—a god not dead, but still followed by a legion of creatures with the weapons of the ancient Gods still kept a secret from us of the surface; and from whom we are protected only by those of the depths who have not inherited the strange disease of sun-polarized mental mechanism which results in the inverted destructive logic which is the character of the true demon. He is not “just a bad man”; he is a thing whose every mental process results invariably in a demoniac resolve, a completely unobstructed intent, to do some injury to life which is not as he is.

**THERE** are several of these feasts of the Demons during the year, but only one Sabbath—the greatest of them all. These people gathered here are those who are the modern descendants of the people responsible in the past for all the wool put in surface men's heads. They pranked and played the devil for the surface man, and laughed at us—and then went to their own feast of the Sabbath and laughed not at all before the awful statue of the God of evil himself.



They behaved like witches with their solidograph projectors, wafted surface women around on broom sticks with the ancient levitation beams, and tweaked the bottoms of the christian priests on the surface in much the same way they had deviled the Greek pagans of Athens and toward as foolish and futile ends.

Witches and warlocks of a mighty kind they might seem to surface men when they played their pranks over the tremendous old miracle rays that were almost their only real contact with the surface; but in the caves they were the dupes of rulers who used them solely because they could be used to kill people who got in their way and not demand payment; who could be used to curse a man who was ambitious, for if told to follow and torment any person from a distance with their ray mech they would do so, "not for a day, not for a year, but always" for their stupidity is of a single-mindedness not understandable to any who do not know the nature of the demon.

The dero is peculiar to the caves, and has to be seen and known for a long period, lived with to be understood or believed in. The stupidity of a creature that looks like a man, has many of man's supposedly divine attributes, yet in truth cannot think much better than a chicken, is a thing hard to believe until you see it for yourself. The dero is the slave of evil thought.

In the caverns, the intelligent men know what evil is, for they can see it in the dero, and know that only degenerate men are evil. On the surface the legend of the cunning and wisdom of evil is still believed in too greatly because we are not acquainted first hand with the thing as it is in persons of hereditarily evil families.

Unfortunately these families, well known for their stupidity and evil life, are not so easily disposed of as might be thought, because a ray position built and weaponed by a God of the Elder race can not be taken even though defended by the veriest fool—because ray of a range sufficient to outrange the ray in fixed position just isn't portable.

Thus the stupid evil demon of the caves lives on because of the invulnerability of the ancient ray positions where he lives for centuries, inviolate and completely destructive of all good in the life under the range of the ancient ray he has inherited through no virtue of his own. There he lives as the dupe and unpaid worker of the Ray-master;

and his art consists of being unctuously useful to the slightest whim of his master, and as nasty to the rest of the world as possible. The dupe, the evil unpaid staff-servant, is the custom of the caves; and their numbers are replenished from the "banned" (ban-shee), the poor mad ones who populate thinly the less desirable reaches of the endless caverns. These have been cast out of the settled, city groups, because too mad or too diseased to live with; but they have children and somehow the children sometimes grow up—in unnameable degradation and conditions of such shame as no surface people can understand.

Still these children grow up and are not always evil, but often *are* evil. These mad nomads have their religions, and the greatest of these is the worship of Satan; but they have also the "white" magic, the "helpers", and many of them serve these as I do, as well as we may. Men like Bonur have their uses for these evil savages of the far, unknown caverns reaches, and cultivate them by such atrocities as this Feast of the Sabbath.

THE people of the cities are not like the savage and hereditarily evil dwellers in the less settled portions of the caves, except in some cities where evil rules entire. In the better cities such men as Brack have carried down the art of repairing the ancient mechanisms, kept alive a science of a mighty kind, the study of the ancient mech, for sale to the highest bidder.

If their stock is looted by some avaricious boss like Bonur, they set out into the endless caverns and come back with many truckloads, many rollats, loaded down with the intricate and tremendously valuable ancient mech, and after repairing it and cleansing the surface of its ages of corrosion—which is very little due to the nature of the metals they use, much of the mech being sheathed in gold—are again in business.

Ships sometimes come from space to buy their wares, and the Lords have always a need of these men, to repair and service their own arsenal of antique weapons, and so do support and protect them in their trade to some extent.

In the cities (cities are really very few in population, the life in the caves is not so numerous as our own—nor so fertile of children), too, live the miners of precious

stones, the strippers of gold from the sheathings of the ancient mechanisms, and miners of precious ores who work the vast deep borings of the Elders' mines, many of which are still worked today after all these dark centuries.

Some of this bullion reaches the surface, and some of the smaller gems, too. But the best of their trade is with the occasional ships from space that have come for their gold since early times. They give in return slaves and merchandise, tools and food, and strange machines of their own from some far planet where life is very different. But these, too, must agree to keep the ancient compact not to tell the surface men anything of the caverns, for their riches are wholly for some of the antique families who still hold the ancient entrances against us—their brothers on the surface—just as they did in the time of the Pharaohs, when they feared we would usurp and rob them of their ancient and invaluable prerogatives, their harems and slaves—and then today of course, there is the bugaboo of a surface "income tax collector". No small fear, either. If they were different in their aims and in their accomplishments for us of the surface I would be the last to expose them to such dangers from our own none too wonderful life and customs. But the good ones of the caves need our help, and I for one would like to see them get it; though how this may come about is a question.

THE idea of extreme stupidity coupled with extreme evil in the same man-beast has no surface parallel but the Nazi, and the motives of the German beast have almost been understandable—but the motivations of these . . .

Picture the motivation of a thing which has no appetite for love, who cannot desire any gentle pleasure, but does desire the opportunity to be cruel, to see blood flow, to eat human flesh, whose whole soul has been replaced, in the whole heritage of blood, by a robot's desire to please the master. This is a thing of a degraded spirit too low for surface man to comprehend except he has experienced them for years. To see a feast prepared especially to gratify all the dark abysmal appetites of this beast of the ever-night of the caves under our feet—this dark abyss of human evil know to us by legend as Hell—to describe it for those who have not seen it is another thing. I will try.

In Pottstown, Pa. one Johnny Bratton dropped dead of heart failure. There had been nothing apparently wrong with Johnny, in fact he had passed a stiff insurance examination just the week before. Everyone was mystified. His young wife was taken with convulsions from grief, lost the child in her womb. His little daughter of seven was inconsolable over Johnny's death, lost weight, nearly died.

Poison was a weapon little used or thought of in the caverns, just as the ray weapons from the caverns are an unused weapon on the surface and an unbelievable idea to most surface people. A murderer on the surface thinks first of a gun, then of poison. A murderer in the caverns thinks first of a ray bolt, then of some other little known and unsuspected use of the ancient rays for the purpose. Usually this murder takes the form of simulating some disease with the facile ancient rays. Often this is a ray upon the lungs which rots away the lung tissue, makes it appear as a lung disease—or a burn in the heart which doctors call heart failure for want of a way to say the truth. Slow poison was not thought of because they are an ignorant people in the ways of medicine and chemistry; a good clerk from a dispensary of sodas could have disposed of the lot of them.

In the caves under Pottstown, a brainless young ghoul laughed and laughed. He had raised hob with Johnny Bratton, hadn't he? He bragged to his companions, crouched like himself about the great old machine they had used to kill Johnny Bratton.

Over three states the influenza raged. It had assumed the proportions of a plague. Over half the United States the flu spread, area by area. The population was reduced a million or so in a couple of years.

Down in the caves a group of nomad ray people were enjoying their new-old game of imitating influenza with the detrimental ray beams. They laughed as the surface people noted that the flu took only the best and strongest, the most loved people. Others had a mild, non-fatal attack. How could they be so stupid as not to know what the disease really was?

It was particularly funny when the death pained a great many—when the person was well beloved. The old devil tradition was blazing strongly in them as the plague moved slowly across the States, and under the plague rolled their caravan of ancient

rollats, bearing their gypsy-like living equipment. It was so easy to put a detrimental ray on a person suffering a mild attack of genuine flu, and watch the disease mount thru his weakened body. It took but a few shots of detrimental ray to make a man so weak he died of the disease.

When one city was finished and most of the love and beauty, the human ties of the city, had been obliterated, the band moved on to decimate another city.

**T**HEIR motivation? It is an old idea they have, they are weakening the people of the surface because they are going to come up to the surface and rule them when they are too weak to fear. But the mad ones of the caves never do come up. The obstacles of moving all their machinery to the surface are too great for their untechnical minds; and they plan it, only to drop the plan after some such orgy of killing the surface men.

In a little town called Stowe, the ex-priest Cachon, a basque who knew a great deal about devils, came out of a wood where he had been hiding near his home. He had been hiding from the devils, something unseen that tormented him, plucking at his mind with evil thoughts, and at his flesh with evil fangs of pain.

Now the devils finally possessed him and he killed a little girl. The priest was sure the little girl was a "devil".

The priest was confined to the asylum for life. Down below Stowe, the devil-ray laughed to "fix" a christian priest so neatly. Many things happen to priests, very strange things, for the devil ray has an ancient and ingrained antipathy for all christianity.

But for real fun they prefer to drive a college professor out of his wits with fantastic projections he cannot explain or dare to mention to others, for fear of the madhouse or at least the loss of his job. "Is that fun!"

Another trick they delight in is getting a priest on the operating table and then take control of the operating surgeon; "ah, how the 'cloth' slaps the hospital table!" It does not matter that the surgeon goes mad, and the priest dies of his mutilations. It is such fun!

During the period of time the preparation of the feast in the Stem went on—the census takers passed through Ontal, beginning the twice yearly census. The census con-

sisted of taking stock of a man's value for some months to come. If he wasn't valuable in a taxable way, he went to the slave block, or if he wasn't healthy enough for that, he went to a little spoken of but much feared place from which no one ever returned. It was odd that next door to this place of death was a canned meat factory, for there is little meat in the underworld to can.

It was pitiful to hear the mothers list their young daughters as a valuable commodity, to keep from losing them entirely. It was pitiful to hear the destitute promise to find treasure soon, note the hope of finding something of value, some hidden store of the valuable old mech for the masters, something overlooked by the centuries of searchers—for with it they could buy freedom.

**T**HE cult is not a "revival" of the centuries-old worship of Satan, but a continuation of the oldest still-operative religion of earth—the worship of the Spirit of Evil—a church which has functioned in the underworld since before Egypt, so near as I can learn.

The figure of Satan was a great robot, which was activated occasionally by the leaders of the cult—those who traditionally wore the devil masks at the feast—mad sadists in the worst way. For Satanists are hereditary sadists. Once, perhaps, their natural characters were altered into evil by some perverted use of the powerful mind-current rays, but so long had such work gone on that the demon character became an hereditary one. Their ancestors might have been coerced and reconstructed mentally by the ancient Demonists of the centuries of the dark ages, but that darkness still survives in such organizations in the masked world, and the character of the demon is now an hereditary and unchanged curse of earth. These demonists must have their torment to watch or be most unhappy and ill-adjusted mentally as any good psychologist would know.

The custom of eating human flesh was an ancient one in the underworld. It was revived occasionally. Sometimes by necessity, but oftener in such ceremonies as these bloody ones of this particular survival of the ancient and evil worship of Satan. The satanist religion, the same that in Medieval times threatened to eclipse the church

(though christian records never admit it). That Satan did not win over our christian church proves nothing except that the Satanists failed to offer more, failed to protect and value their followers as highly as the christians, though neither of them were

particularly noted for rich rewards for services rendered.

And there you have the TRUTH about the caves, and about my stories. What are you going to DO about it?

Richard S. Shaver

# Vignettes

## OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

### *Tartaglia*

**His real name was Niccolo Fortuna, and he was the greatest mathematician of that era of the new, the sixteenth century**

**N**ICCOLO TARTAGLIA, Italian Mathematician, was born in the city of Brescia in northern Italy, in the year 1506. Practically nothing is surely known of his parentage although his childhood was passed in dire poverty. During the sack of Brescia in 1512, he was horribly mutilated by some French soldiers. From these injuries he slowly recovered, but he long continued to stammer in his speech, hence the nickname "Tartaglia." His real name was Niccolo Fortuna. He was self-taught and possessed naturally high mathematical ability. He was a teacher and lecturer on the subject of mathematics at the University of Verona, and later taught the science in Venice. He was also a writer on physics which was, at the time, beginning to emerge as a separate department of knowledge from its ancestry in mechanics, as various phenomena of motion, heat, etc., were subjected to preliminary mathematical analysis. In 1548 Tartaglia accepted a situation as professor of Euclid at Brescia, but returned to Venice at the end of 18 months. He died at Venice in 1559.

Tartaglia's first printed work entitled "The New Science," published in 1537, dealt with the theory and practice of gunnery. He found the elevation giving the greatest range to be  $45^\circ$ , but failed to demonstrate the correctness of his intuition. He discovered, or at least investigated, the law of falling bodies, and applied its principles to the flight of artillery projectiles. His "Quesiti et invenzioni diverse" (1546), a collection of the author's replies to questions addressed to him, was dedicated to Henry VIII, of England. Problems in artillery occupy two out of nine books; the sixth treats of

fortification; the ninth gives several examples of the solution of cubic equations. In 1551 his publication alluded to his personal troubles at Brescia, setting forth a method for raising sunken ships and describing the diving-bell, then little known in western Europe. His largest work was a comprehensive mathematical treatise. He published the first Italian translation of Euclid in 1543, and the earliest version of some of the works of Archimedes including "De insidentibus aquae," of which his Latin now holds the place of the lost Greek text. Tartaglia claimed the invention of the gunner's quadrant.

He is principally remembered, however, in connection with the subject of the cubic equation, which was the algebraic conundrum of his time. According to general belief he discovered the method of its solution during the year 1541, and, as the story goes, gave it, under a solemn promise of secrecy, to one Girolamo Cardano, a fellow countryman and also a brilliant mathematician, but, in addition, a most disreputable and unscrupulous character. Cardano unhesitatingly violated the confidence reposed in him, and published the solution over his own name, and as his own discovery. In spite of the efforts Tartaglia made, even to the extent of carrying the question into the courts, Cardano succeeded so well in palming off the discovery as his own, that ever since it has been known in the books as "Cardano's Method," though it has been conclusively shown that the credit rightly belongs to Tartaglia. It was perhaps the most important and certainly the most interesting mathematical accomplishment of the sixteenth century.



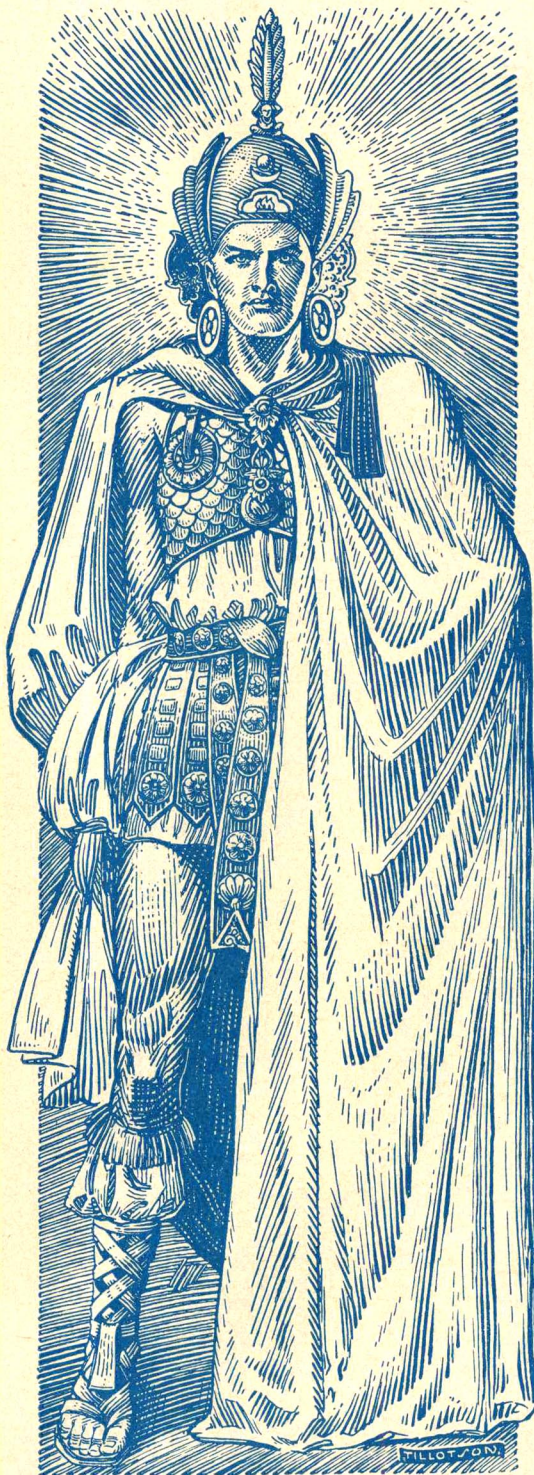
# THE KING OF THE WORLD?

**Is there an underground cave city called Agharti ruled by a Venusian who holds our future hopes?**

**A**LL through the world today are thousands of people who claim to have knowledge of an underground city, not specifically located although generally assumed to be in Tibet, called Agharti, or Shambala. In this city, they say, is a highly developed civilization ruled by an "Elder" or a "Great One" whose title is among others "The King of the World." Some claim to have seen him, and it is also claimed that he made at least one visit to the surface. It is also claimed that when Mankind is ready for the benefits he can bring, he will emerge and establish a new civilization of peace and plenty.

To quote the words of a "witness": "He came here ages ago from the planet Venus to be the instructor and guide of our then just dawning humanity. Though he is thousands of years old, his appearance is that of an exceptionally well-developed and handsome youth of about sixteen. But there is nothing juvenile about the light of infinite love, wisdom and power that shines from his eyes. He is slightly larger than the average man, but there are no radical differences in race."

Apparently the ruler of Agharti is a man; apparently he possesses great power and science, including atomic energy machines. Apparently also he is dedicated to bring to us great benefits. Apparently he has power to end warfare on the surface at will. We, the people of Earth, ask: What man can judge another? Wars must end now! Judge not, Great One, lest you be judged. For we ARE ready for peace!





# **SATELLITE SPACE SHIP STATION**

The hazards of gravity make it impractical to land giant liners of space directly on a planet, so satellite depots, permanently anchored several thousand miles out in space will provide terminals for such ships. Smaller craft will connect with surface depots. (See page 178 for complete story)

